

The Great Code: The Bible and Literature
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982

Selected reviews by Robert Alter, John E. Becker, Joseph P. Cabill, J.M. Cameron, John Dominic Crossan, Louis Dudek, Susan Einbinder, William O. Fennell, Michael Fixler, Alexander Globe, Joseph Gold, David L. Jeffrey, Herbert J. Levine, Eli Mandel, Lynn Poland, Peter Richardson, Charles Wheeler, Donald Wiebe, and George Woodcock.

1. Alter, Robert. *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 17 (Summer 1983): 20–22.

Since *The Great Code* for the most part has the unfortunate effect of revealing the defects of its author's virtues, something should be said first about those virtues. Northrop Frye, long before the new wave of literary theory, was the first widely influential critic writing in English to conceive literature as a system and to try to define the intricacies of its workings systematically.

He has exhibited a Viconian deftness in the articulation of historical and generic schemata (Vico in fact is given some prominence in the first chapter of the new book), spelling out the stages and aspects of his sundry literary cycles and sequences with a boldness that always has an intrinsic poetic allure and sometimes a certain explanatory power. Frye has brilliantly scanned a vast corpus of literary texts, ancient and modern, spotting significant interconnections others have overlooked, or, at the very least, imaginatively arguing for the connections that have struck him. *The Great Code*, which he conceives as a "restatement"—and, implicitly, a kind of summation—of the critical outlook he has developed over the past three decades, has moments of engaging wit and even penetrating insight, as one would expect from so intelligent a writer, but the project as a whole exposes an underlying weakness of Frye's predilection for schemata and networks of connection.

A more accurate subtitle for the new book than the one it has been given would be "The Bible and Archetypes," for one learns little here about literature, or about the Bible and literature, or about the Bible, though there is an eloquent exposition offered by a loyal modern adherent of the traditional Christian typological view of the Bible. A good deal of space is devoted to rehearsing what is familiar from dozens of handbooks on the Bible or from the biblical texts themselves—ranging from paraphrases of the arguments of Ecclesiastes and Job to summaries of the Mesopotamian flood story and other ancient Near Eastern antecedents to the Bible. But when Frye is not reviewing familiar material, what he says about the Bible generally proves to be at least a little misleading and sometimes dead wrong. The basic problem—and I believe it is also a basic problem in his whole conception of literature—is that he is far too concerned with the comprehensive structure of archetypes to attend with much discrimination to the differential structures of specific literary texts. For Frye, the individual case is finally interesting only to the degree in which it participates in the archetype; indeed, in some sense it is the archetype that validates the individual case for him, that confirms its status as literary expression.

Given this orientation, Christian typology becomes an ideally congenial way of organizing disparate texts, and in fact, *The Great Code* makes one wonder whether Christian typology may not have been the ultimate model on which *Anatomy of Criticism* was based. To be sure, Frye's frame of reference for typology is more modern anthropology than medieval theology. Writing with a sense of historical perspective, he does not seriously imagine that the authors of the tale of the binding of Isaac in Genesis and of the dead and resuscitated son of the Shunamite woman in Kings were explicitly adumbrating the story of the crucifixion and resurrection. But in the logic of his system,

those earlier tales of threatened and saved sons are structurally subsumed under the Christ story, in a way “fulfilled” through it because the crucifixion and resurrection perfectly realize, and thus make perfectly transparent, the implicit archetypality of the Old Testament tales. “The two testaments,” Frye affirms, “form a double mirror, each reflecting the other but neither the world outside” [78]. I think this formulation discards the problem of referentiality in the Bible too readily, but I would like to address myself particularly to the distortions involved in Frye’s viewing the Old Testament in the conviction that it should be imagined as one panel in a diptych mirror.

To begin with, everything must be seen as ordered progression moving from Old to New. Thus, he proposes seven “phases” of biblical literature forming a causal and chronological sequence: creation, revolution, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse. Any careful scrutiny of the actual evolution of biblical religion and the complicated history of the production of the sundry biblical texts will reveal that this sequence—most transparently, in the three middle phases—does not reflect a diachronic process at all but only Frye’s rhetorical ingenuity. Similarly, Frye proposes a biblical “structure of imagery” [139]—“demonic,” “analogical,” and “apocalyptic”—moving in grand progression away from “the oasis imagery of trees and water” [142] in Eden through pastoral, agricultural, and then urban imagery, and finally back to a new Eden. Again the variegated data of the texts suggest nothing like this orderly “structure.” The biblical poets referred to oases and gardens and sheep and vineyards because these were part of the reality they inhabited; they also referred to glassmaking and ceramics and architecture and laundry processes, but Frye passes over these in silence because they do not neatly confirm his schema. If the biblical writers had had bicycles and refrigerators, they would have also made those part of their stockpile of metaphors. For Frye, however, the final source of the image is the archetype, not reality. Thus, when the first Psalm compares the righteous man to “a tree planted by rivers of water,” Frye immediately perceives this as “the paradisaic imagery of trees and water” [150]. But there is nothing at all paradisaic in the distinctly this-worldly, non-mythological poem that is Psalm 1, and the simile is invoked because everyone living in the Near Eastern climate and topography knew that only a tree planted close to a source of fresh water could have healthy roots and hope to flourish.

A good many of the archetypal misreadings are graver than this. Frye sees traces of an Oedipus myth in the creation of Adam, “whose ‘mother,’ so far as he had one, was the feminine *adamah* or dust of the ground, to whose body he returned after breaking the link with his father” [156]. This is imaginative but perverse. The story presents God as Adam’s fashioner, never as his father; there are no textual hints of anything maternal about the earth which, far from being a submerged Gaea-Tellus, is represented here as mere raw material for man’s construction; and in a language where all nouns have gender, the fact that *adamah* is feminine (as is also, for example, the biblical word for sword) hardly suggests in itself female identity.

Frye cites a Babylonian ritual of ceremonial humiliation of the king by the high priest as an explanation for the remarkable clash between David and his wife Michal on his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, dancing and cavorting before the Ark of the Covenant. She rebukes him for exposing himself (apparently, in the sexual sense); he retorts sarcastically by saying he will make himself as lowly as he pleases, for he, and not her father’s house, has been chosen to rule. Now, for Frye, it is important to assimilate this story to the supposed archetype of the humiliated king because then it becomes a typological anticipation of the crucifixion. But the only way to reach such a reading is by ignoring all the rich details of the story, which is manifestly about the explosively loaded marital and political relationship between David and Michal that has evolved over many years and has nothing whatever to do with rituals of royal humiliation. There are more instances than I can take space to enumerate of such wrenching of literary materials out of their defining contexts into the more edifying and obfuscating context of archetypal schemata. Metaphors are invented and then said to inform the text. Thus, Frye suggests that the “beginning” introduced in Genesis 1 is

not birth but “rather the moment of waking from sleep” [108], an interesting enough idea, nowhere intimated in the text but which is said to be “the central metaphor underlying” the biblical creation [108]. The keyword *hebel* (AV “vanity”) in Ecclesiastes, which means the breath of one’s mouth, or vapor—that is, something fleeting and insubstantial—is said to mean, on no philological authority, “dense fog” [124], so that it can play a symbolic role against light in the archetypal system Frye proposes for Ecclesiastes.

Let me offer one final example. Reading Job with Christian, typological eyes, Frye asserts that “Job lives in enemy territory, in the embrace of heathen and Satanic power which is symbolically the belly of the leviathan, the endless extent of time and space” [195]. Every element of this statement happens to be false. There are no heathen in this scrupulously monotheistic book. There is equally no “Satanic power” in Job: The Adversary or Prosecuting Attorney (he is never designated with a proper name in the Hebrew) is not the Satan of Christian demonology and has no “territory” or power independent of God. A figure of ancient Near Eastern folklore rather than of mythology proper, he is one of a vaguely conceived crowd of *benei elohim*, divine beings, with a specific function of oppositionalism in the narrative. It is only later tradition that will develop him into the Prince of Evil. The Book of Job is concerned obsessively with man’s finitude and not at all with endless time and space, and I fail to see by what mental gyration Job could be said to be living in the belly of the leviathan.

Yet Frye goes on to conclude about the ending of the book: “The fact that God can point out these monsters [leviathan and behemoth] to Job means that Job is outside them, and no longer under their power” [196]. Frye, of course, exhibits an archetypal kneejerk response to leviathan and behemoth, assuming, because leviathan is elsewhere mythological, that they must both be mythological and demonic creatures in the Book of Job. But, if one really bothers to read the context, it is perfectly clear that these two strange beasts are part of a grand zoological catalogue, that they are the crocodile and the hippopotamus, quite realistically rendered in many respects, though with a degree of poetic hyperbole that draws on mythology for heightening effects. The poet’s point is that both are exotic and uncanny beasts dwelling along the Nile, far from Job’s observation, and thus are vividly part of that vast panorama of creation beyond his ken. In any case, they are not represented in the poem as evil; on the contrary; they are objects of God’s providential supervision as Creator: and in no sense could anything that preceded lead us to imagine Job was ever in either of their bellies, figuratively or otherwise. One could hardly have invented a clearer case in which the adhesion to archetypes has led a gifted mind to drastic misreading.

Individual literary texts, of course, cannot be read in isolation. Literature is certainly a cumulative tradition and, as Frye has so often argued, an endlessly cross-referential system. But by fixing above all on the system, we may forget to look for what the individual text gives us that is fresh, surprising, subtly or startlingly innovative, and that, alas, is the fault illustrated page after page in *The Great Code*.

2. Becker, John E. “The Word of God and the Work of Man.” *Worldview* 25 (September 1982): 5–8.

Modern physicists have penetrated far beyond vision into an ultimate pantheon of mesons and muons and other demiurges of matter. We have managed to turn their poetic penetration into the physical threats of Three Mile Island and a nuclear arms race. American statesmen after World War II, with uncommon and far-reaching vision, set about restoring a devastated world. The world they produced, a world of free, interdependent, and disputatious nations, seems to many Americans and myopic political leaders a source of embarrassment rather than the fruit of our own farsighted

statesmanship. It is also a world marked by “a constant and steady perversion of the vision of a free and equal social future, as country after country makes a bid for freedom and accepts instead a tyranny far worse than the one it endured before. There seems to escaping the inference that the real desire for freedom and quality is not only repressed . . . but is in fact one of the most deeply repressed feelings we have.”

It is not hard to catch, in these words of the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye, echoes of the central message of the English poet William Blake: on the day-to-day level we are frightened by our own dreams; we misuse them and we defeat ourselves. The mills and factories of our world may seem not quite so dark and satanic as the mills of Blake’s world, largely because we now live in a culture of workers; there is no significant leisured class. Yet we do not seem to understand our work, if indeed we can even discern that we have real work to do. “A good deal of human activity is wasted or perverted energy, making war, feeding a parasitic class, building monuments to paranoid conquerors, and the like. The genuine work which is founded on the human need for food and shelter moves in the direction of transforming nature into a world with a human shape, meaning, and function.” The world, says Frye, is but an environment, indifferent to us. But by means of the word—the worlds we make with our imagination—we work to make it our home.

The scope of Frye’s writing is encyclopedic. It may be entered through many conceptual gateways. But the clarity of his idea of human work, and of the work of the critic in particular, makes that entryway a particularly attractive one. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* is Frye’s latest work of literary criticism, the first of two books on the Bible, by which he means both testaments. In the language of conventional biblical scholarship it is his “general introduction,” covering such matters as language, translation, style. But Frye’s introduction, though general, is certainly not conventional. Reading him is a bit like reading Ralph Waldo Emerson. There is an argument, a structure of thought, but the sentence-by-sentence insights are so rich that the mind goes spinning off into reflections of its own, refusing to be controlled by a center. The falcon will not hear the falconer. But the center does hold, and one who returns and traces the movement of the argument will find it strict in inner coherence.

The image of the center seems appropriate. Frye sweeps the horizon of his subject like a radar beam, always revealing the whole of it, yet giving new dimensions with each sweep. Part one is “The Order of Words” and proceeds through language, myth, metaphor, and typology. Part two, “The Order of Types,” moves in reverse order through typology, metaphor, myth, and language. But each topic has been transformed in the meantime, retaining the shape of its earlier moment, yet standing forth in a new and different light. Frye is not very useful to a teacher of the Bible who wants to look something up. Frye, however, knows his work: “All my books have really been teachers’ manuals, concerned more with establishing perspectives than with adding specifically to knowledge” [xiv]. But “the teacher. . . is not primarily someone who knows instructing someone who does not know. He is rather someone who attempts to re-create the subject in the student’s mind” [xv]. In other words, the reader will have understood *The Great Code* if, having read it, he returns to the Bible and reads *it*, less concerned with applying the patterns he has learned from Frye than with recreating the Bible, taking possession of it on his own terms, emulating Frye only in his concern to see the Bible as a unity, as the ground of our literary heritage.

Frye’s work on the Bible signifies, for him, an arrival. His study of William Blake at the beginning his career transformed, he tell us, his attitude toward literature. Gripped by Blake’s effort to create not just a body of work but a mythology that would recreate and revitalize the mythology of the past, Frye tried his own daring sweep, recreating all of Western literature as a single comprehensive system in the *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Millennia of literature are swept into cycles, from myth to irony, spring through winter, wheels within wheels like Ezekiel’s vision of the throne of God. The *Anatomy* is not so much a critical method as an image of Frye’s own recreation of

literature. What he insists on is that literature is a body of structured thought and not just an accumulation of reading exercises. The proper response to the *Anatomy* is the same as the proper response to *The Great Code*: one rereads and recreates his own literary heritage, taking possession of it in its totality. Frye continued his work, studying Milton, Shakespeare, and English Romanticism. In *The Educated Imagination* (1964), *The Well-Tempered Critic* (1963), and *The Critical Path* (1971) he continued also to clarify his sense of how critics contribute to the universal human task of building a human community. In all of these works the Bible is a dominating presence; the phrase from Blake, “The Great Code,” a recurring promise. Before trying to outline the fulfillment of that promise, let me first try to sketch in the basic notion of the work of the critic—who is, according to Frye, not the spinner of sophisticated analyses, but the teacher who tries to get his students to recreate their culture.

Frye begins by noting that though we may think of our ordinary language as prose, it is not. What we actually speak is kind of associative rhythm of companionable signals, emotive and expressive rather than communicative. We are more anxious for reassurance than careful of clarity or alert for new information. If ordinary language, however, remains our only form of talk, then the charming chatter of childhood becomes the pure babble of the isolated ego that can find community only in a mob.

Training in our own language brings us into the realm of community and communication. Poetry is the first step. It is the repository of a community’s stories, its collection of wisdom, and its catalogue of knowledge. It remains throughout our lives the basic route of access to our most fundamental human needs and fears. Having begun with poetry, education draws us on to the deliberative and descriptive syntax of prose, where the sentence disciplines our thoughts so they may be communicated to others. Here—a frightening experience—we learn to recognize ourselves as other and—an exhilarating experience—to recognize the world of information as controllable, something we can organize, and *criticize* too. Though both of these developments, poetry and prose, are developments out of ordinary speech, they remain dependent on ordinary speech and its emotive rhythms for vitality and authenticity. “The area of ordinary speech, as I see it, is a battleground between two forms of social speech, the speech of a mob and the speech of a free society. . . . Nobody is capable of free speech unless he knows how to use language, and such knowledge is not a gift: it has to be learned and worked at.”

Poetry and prose bring us to the point at which we are capable of taking conscious possession of our culture. That culture consists of a verbal universe within which are two nested and complementary kinds of myth. The “myth of concern” is a single and unified body of stories, a mythological system, which identifies our culture and enshrines its values. In some societies this is the only moral arena for literary activity. In an open society, on the other hand, the myth of concern is complemented by a “myth of freedom.” The literature of such a culture may transcend conflict, escape the here and now, point beyond socially defined “realities” to infinite possibilities. The prototypes of this action are Socrates devising an intellectual escape from the domination of the Homeric myth, the Hebrew prophet demanding that the people get beyond the limited vision they have established in sin and allow God to act. Freedom and free speech, then, are not mere catchwords for Frye, but the ground of the critic’s commitment to society. “For most of us, free speech is cultivated speech, but cultivating speech is not just a skill, like playing chess. You can’t cultivate speech, beyond a certain point, unless you have something to say, and the basis of what you have to say is your vision of society.”

If the content of free speech is the vision of society, the failure of free speech is the starvation of the imagination that envisions it. Critics have objected to Frye’s recurrent argument that literature is not an accumulation of unique works but an autonomous and interconnected structure of knowledge. We will in a moment attend to this in literary terms, but Frye has a moral as

well as a literary point: To put it in its most scandalous form, the artist is recreating the New Jerusalem; and the critic, in his work as teacher, encourages his students to the same creative vision. The taking possession of culture is the all-important appropriation of the dream of a New Jerusalem.

Let us return, however, to the literary experience on which Frye's theory is based. We tend to think of the ideal literary experience as an experience of unmediated vision. A play, a book, a lyric bursts upon us and transforms in a moment our whole way of seeing. Yet, says Frye, though this is a wondrous event, it is rare and accidental. Who of us could expect to appropriate our culture on the basis of the few such privileged moments we are likely to be granted? Head colds, a bad stand-in for the lead, indigestion, small print, all or any of these can spoil the epiphany. Rather, we must recognize that the experience of literature ordinarily proceeds through two stages.

There is first the sequential experience, the page-turning of a good read or the act-by-act-development of a play. Whether this is wonderful or not so wonderful may depend, as we have seen, less on the art than on accidents. We move on to a second stage, however, when what was at first spread out through time is now present to us as a whole. We begin to see its art, its self-reference, the interconnections of words and images, how they define and redefine each other in an organic development which may become so powerful that it detaches itself from any immediate context and becomes a kind of monument of perfect language. This second stage, the beginning of critical appreciation, is certainly not confined to critics. For all of us the accumulation of these experiences begins to arrange itself into patterns: tragedy, comedy, romance, pastoral; people become heroes, fools, villains.

Teachers find out these interconnections by necessity, but others too find themselves speaking of one book in terms of another, one play or film in terms of a whole corpus of drama. A training of the mind occurs, a unity of subject develops; we recognize that both the experience of literature and the study of literature are legitimate parts of our total possession of it. The teacher sees that though he does not directly teach literature, he teaches the principles and insights which unify it into a body of knowledge. If the student responds, Tom Jones' shrug at the possibility of having slept with his mother leaps out as a comment on Oedipus' bleeding eyes. Huck Finn becomes Sancho Panza moved to the center of the stage, and Tom Sawyer a decadent Don Quixote. Experience adds to experience, experience corrects experience, and we acquire a habit, a virtue of literature.

It is the teachability of this habit, its availability, that makes literature democratic. The appreciation of literature is not the privileged act of an aesthetic elite who shrugs off the hunger of those who despair of sharing its culture. Nor is it the decorative activity of a single class, whether working or leisured, whose values are defined in its literature for the purpose of excluding the rest. Moreover, preoccupation with the uniqueness of each literary work, the systematic deemphasis of its inevitable relationship to other works, tends to subject the literary experience to a false demand for relevance. It comes to mean to us only what it means at the moment; it becomes vulnerable to use as rhetoric: a tool for carrying belief into action. But when the critic's work links literary experience to literary experience, literature becomes a body of hypothetical thought and action subsisting freely in the imagination. It can then float free even of the quirky and often limited ideas of the artists and writers who produce it. It becomes a shared and sharable vision of the human community, the human source of spiritual authority.

And if this democratizing process fails to take place, we are left not just with a population of comic boors who would rather be out bowling or playing bridge but with men and women deprived of a source of spiritual authority, or, worse, men and women eager to turn themselves over to the authority of closed and intolerant, cheap and destructive systems of religious or secular belief. The failure to possess one's culture is the failure to grasp the possibilities it has created for the realization of human community.

As Frye's understanding of education is rooted in the child's acquisition of language, so his thinking about the Bible begins in the earliest stages of Western culture's development of language. First there was a language of metaphor in which the name of a god was immediate to natural forces, whether the inner forces of the psyche or the outer forces of nature. Monotheism arises in connection with a later development of language toward metonymy. The single divine force transcends all natural and psychic forces; and words get their meanings by allegorical reference to ideas in the divine mind. God is finally displaced by the development of the objective language of today wherein says Frye, a God who is not dead may be buried.

Myth—the plot of the stories men use their language to tell—develops into a mythological system that eventually forms a defining boundary around a culture. The Christian Bible, read sequentially, is the founding mythological system of Western culture. But once we have read it sequentially, and grasped it whole, it becomes a “single, gigantic, complex metaphor” [63] expressing not the cyclic structure of paganism but the image of beginning and end. The meaning of this metaphor is clarified in the New Testament, where it becomes a vision of upward metamorphosis; we begin here and now but move toward a new and higher stage of existence.

The bond that unifies the Bible into this single and complex metaphor is typology. Typology is like allegory in that it seeks the meaning of events outside the events themselves; but instead of finding that meaning in a conceptual system, typology discovers it through later events. Adam's fall is illuminated by Christ's redemption. The progress of the Jews through the Red Sea and across the Jordan River into the Promised Land is made meaningful by the passage of Christ through death and of the Christian through the waters of baptism. The whole concern of the New Testament writers is to affirm every possible connection between the events of Christ's life and the events, images, and prophetic oracles of the Old Testament. The meaning of Christ is his typological connection with the whole Bible.

The unity created by the bond of typology allows us to see the Bible as moving through seven phases: creation, revolution, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse. Each phase assumes and intensifies the other. Creation responds to our basic need to assert an origin that explains who we are. Revolution, the Exodus, initiates the historical life of the people, which is then institutionalized in Law. Wisdom individualizes the Law, and Prophecy sees the creative possibilities beyond the here-and-now, thus establishing a basic drive of Western literature to resist the here-and-now in favor of the visionary possible. The Gospel phase assumes the Old Testament pattern of the rise and fall of the people under countervailing forces: their own self-limiting sins and God's redemptive power. It lifts all this, then, onto a new plane with the notion of *metanoia*, a transforming vision of the possibilities of human life, free of the sin that blocks God's activity. The Sermon on the Mount is a comment on the Ten Commandments; but its force is in the revelation of an ideal above law, and to turn it into a new set of institutional commands is to pervert it. The perfection of Jesus is irrelevant to moral conformity; he represents the confrontation of the complete individual with the destructive legalism of every human society. Christians assumed that it was Jewish legalism that killed Jesus, and so they remained blind to their own. But Jesus, says Frye, is the one man in history whom no society could have allowed to live.

The Apocalypse, finally, is not a gigantic fireworks display coming next Tuesday but the inner meaning of all that is happening now. It is not directed at the obvious power of the secular world; it points to the inner meaning that may break over anyone at any time. The apocalyptic destruction of nature is the destruction of our way of seeing nature.

At a point in *The Secular Scripture* (1976), Northrop Frye puts the glory and the unreality of literature in its most fundamental terms: “In a life that is a pure continuum, beginning with a birth that is a random beginning, ending with a death that is a random ending, nothing is more absurd than telling stories that do begin and end. Yet this is part of the counter-absurdity of human

creation” [125]. In the dark light of this vision, attacks on the unreality of literature show up for what they are: the blindness of men kidding themselves that their ephemeral modes of perception are ineluctable science, that their technological mastery has achieved a sounder reality than the primitive imaginative drive of the singer of tales.

We need Northrop Frye. What he tells us is no other than what Ernest Becker tells us in *The Denial of Death*: that culture is our only defense against absurdity. Frye’s understanding of culture, rooted in the fundamental act of human creativity, grows and spreads to a wondrous ramifying vision of human words as religion, as philosophy, as literature that embraces them all and excludes none. This world created by the human imagination, though not the world of daily work, is the source of its meaning.

But why should the political thinker, the “scientist” of society, the bureaucrat or the technocrat of social systems want to read Northrop Frye? If they read him, they will be tempted to resist what literary critics have resisted in Frye: an acknowledgement of the fictional world as an autonomous world. The Balkanization of study that has gone on for decades has tended to set discipline against discipline. Fighting for their own privileged access to a reality before which they feign passivity, thinkers have learned to evade both the necessity and the validity of their own creativity. But the modern world, confronted by problems of every dimension from birth to death, from population explosion to nuclear explosion, problems that know no disciplinary boundaries, pushes us to confront the ultimate fictive quality of every discipline.

Once that is acknowledged, however, each of us may discover the richness of our own resources. Econometric models, models of the atom, myths of creation, stories of another world—these are the realm of the imagination out of which the solutions to problems come. Without such an imaginative world the animality of man in nature and the alienation of man from nature would combine to destroy him. “The feeling that death is inevitable comes to us from ordinary experience; the feeling that new life is inevitable comes to us from myth and fable. The latter is therefore both more true and more important.”

What is at stake is the possibility of human community. The rejection of that imaginative world created and recreated by the artist in all of us is the rejection of a vision of human community. Too many people can only conceive of community on the immediate or even private level. Our only human instrument for seeing farther is the imaginative instrument of language and culture. To reject one’s culture is to evade the large responsibility. If we say that it is the New Jerusalem that literature is building, then how easy it is to use that term as an excuse for rejection: Literature is a visionary, utopian, unrealistic; it makes bad diplomats. And so reality continues to be defined in the satanic language of our self-induced slavery to present institutions. The arms race may go on safely to Armageddon while the Third World continues to redefine nationalism as the building of slave camps. It is a question of what men want: “The world of work is also an expression of desire as well as of need: what man really wants is what the positive and productive work he does shows that he wants. In literature there are two great organizing patterns. One is the natural cycle itself; the other, a final separation between an idealized and happy world and a horrifying or miserable one. Comedy moves in the general direction of the former, and traditionally closes in some such formula as ‘They lived happily ever after.’ Tragedy moves in the opposite direction, and toward the complementary formula ‘Count no man happy until he is dead.’ The moral effect of literature is normally bound up with its assumptions that we prefer to identify ourselves with the happy world and detach ourselves from the wretched one. The record of history, in itself, does not indicate this: it indicates that man is quite as enthusiastic about living in hell as in heaven.”

3. Cahill, Joseph P. “Deciphering *The Great Code.*” *Dalhousie Review* 63 (Autumn 1983): 412-21.

Introduction.

The literary critic and the Biblical scholar share a similar enterprise. But, as Hans Dieter Betz once pointed out, they are somewhat like relatives who only occasionally meet and exhibit a certain awkwardness in halting attempts at conversation. Usually a respectful distance is maintained. Rare would be the individual claiming competency in both literary criticism and Biblical scholarship. Nonetheless Northrop Frye, while occasionally being apologetic about presumed deficiencies in what are assumed to be the tools of modern Biblical scholarship, speaks both as a literary critic and as one thoroughly acquainted with the Bible. This puts him clearly within the circle of literary interpreters, a circle which surely contains Biblical scholars.

Mainly because of the staying power of the Bible and its enduring capacity to evoke and respond “to progressive critical treatment” [1], Frye classifies the Bible as “deeply serious” [221], a book with an imaginative unity which has continually expanded human vision [pp. 167, 226, 227, 230, 232]. Hence Frye seeks to articulate a conceptual framework which will account for the Biblical power, for its imaginative unity, and, he hopes, lead “to the open community of vision, and to the charity that is the informing principle of a still greater community than faith” [227]. Uncovering the power of the Biblical narrative and generating hope for a transformation of consciousness quite evidently must begin with the Biblical language. Examination of the sequential ordering of words (*mythos* precedes and parallels scrutiny of types). So, we have the chiasmic structure which should satisfy any Biblical critic: language I, myth I, metaphor I, typology I—typology II, metaphor II, myth II, and language II.

The Unity of the Bible

If one seeks a simple answer to the question, “Wherein resides the imaginative unity, and hence the power, of the Bible?” the response would be, primarily in its typological structure, its recurrent imagery, its stylistic coherence. This unity emerges “rather mysteriously . . . from a vision of the world from creation to apocalypse” [7]. The Bible is, in earlier words of Frye, “encyclopedic form.” This assertion relates neatly to themes that Frye has elsewhere elaborated, particularly to his discussions of myths of concern and of freedom. That any reader should find such startling unity in a book formed over a protracted period of oral reminiscence and transmission, one shaped mainly by anonymous compilers, elusively redacted, filled with a diversity of forms and genres mainly taken from adjacent cultures, populated with characters of very contrasting moral qualities, and centered on a very patriarchal and willful God, is indeed astonishing and ultimately mysterious.

Typological Unity

No modern writer has insisted more on the typological unity of the Bible than Northrop Frye. We are not here speaking of the very obvious and explicit instances of typology that have mainly occupied the attention of Biblical scholars. Rather, Frye speaks of a typological structure.

Inside the story of Adam is the story of Israel, who falls from a Promised Land into the bondage of Egypt and Babylon. Besides being a second Adam, Christ is also a second Israel who wins back, in a spiritual form, the Promised Land and its capital city, Jerusalem. In this

capacity, the story of the Exodus or deliverance of Israel from Egypt prefigures his life in the Gospels (“The Typology of Paradise Regained,” *Modern Philology* 53 [May 1956]: 229).

To this critical observation made more than a quarter of a century ago, Frye now adds a sequence of phases “of Biblical typology, each phase being a type of the one following it and an antitype of the one preceding it” [106]. In ascending order the phases are: creation, revolution (exodus), law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel and apocalypse. The perceptive reader may note a similarity here to Paul Ricoeur’s analysis of Biblical discourse into the five forms of prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, and hymnic discourse. The similarity, not of outcome but of procedure, is more striking when one considers that each writer is attempting to restore the historical character of revelation as well as its force by returning to the original shape, form, and style of the Biblical revelation.

Typological phases are grounded in Frye’s theory of polysemous meaning, “a single process growing in subtlety and comprehensiveness, not different senses, but different intensities or wider contexts of a continuous sense, unfolding like a plant out of a seed” [p, 221]. Frye’s use of polysemous is, in fact, quite traditional in its dialectical development of the ancient literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic levels of Biblical interpretation. It is very reminiscent of Vincent of Lerins statement, used in the Decree on Revelation in Vatican I, that “*intelligentia. scientia. sapientia*” should continually grow, both in the individual and the community. What Frye adds to the tradition is a thematization, the combination of types and antitypes into a spiralling process in which each type is absorbed into a subsequent antitype including and enlarging on its predecessor. This is the order of types.

Incidental to the order of Biblical types and antitypes are the antitypes constituted by theologians, by ecclesiastical authority, and, indeed, by every reader. One cannot help being reminded of Jochaim of Fiore and the theoretical problems that leap to mind when “every text is the type of its own reading” [226] and where the “antitype starts in the reader’s mind” [226]. One may here wish that a forthcoming work of Frye would unravel this inevitable impetus to system and the implications it has not simply for the reader but for the community of vision and for the higher levels of integration of which Frye frequently speaks. When you have the present event, person, or thing becoming an antitype but ultimately destined itself to become a type, there are severe theoretical implications, mainly, I think, theological but not unconnected with a realistic literary criticism.

Earlier Frye had insisted that typological thinking was really a form of literary design—which indeed it is. In the present work there is the implicit but undeveloped theme that faith, hope, and vision perceives a unity and then articulates this unity. This is reasonably close to what Robert Alter has called the informing vision of God’s design which works in history. Here faith both perceives and creates. An informing vision, relying now on the medieval connotations of the term “informing,” is something more than literary design, perhaps not separable from it but certainly distinct. One awaits further development of the semantic transformations which made history into theophany and expressed the contrasting poles of design versus disorder through typological phases.

Imagery

As Frye moved from instances of typology and typological structure to phases of typology, he now progresses from simple recurring imagery—the city, the garden, the sheepfold—to “phases of imagery in the history of Israel” [142]. Frye devotes two pages to an outline of Apocalyptic Imagery and its counterpart, Demonic Imagery, an antiphonal relationship. The divine, angelic, paradisaical, human, animal, and vegetable categories of apocalyptic imagery each have a class and corresponding individual. For instance, the paradisaical category takes the form of the Garden of Eden and is

individualized as the Tree of Life and Water of Life. The paradisaical category of demonic imagery has the manifest demonic form of the waste-land or sea of death; its group and individual parody is the Tree and Water of Heathen Power. The phasal progression is from pastoral through agricultural to urban. As if to stress the conservative nature of these conceptual categories, Frye explicitly notes that these classifications echo the Great Chain of Being and thus are based on hierarchical progression and the principle of ascending plenitude [165].

Functionally recurring imagery performs three roles. First, it stimulates the memory, secondly expands vision, and thirdly unifies the reader's literary experience. In a book which terminates with revelation, memory and hope coalesce. In the Book of Revelation all the motifs are assembled. Christ is the One God, the One Man, the One Lamb, the One Tree (of Life), the One Temple. To this Frye might have added that there too Christ is the One Light and the One Word, permeating, transmitting, incorporating, and heightening the first creation generated by a Word.

There is neither the time nor the need to amplify Frye's reflections on unifying imagery in the Bible. But it is useful to recall, however briefly, the two types of reading postulated by Frye. Centripetal reading is the organizing effort of the mind to unify the total text into a meaningful thematic totality. Centrifugal reading is understanding the image by its relationship to an outside referent, i.e., the meaning the term or image has in the latest dictionary or monograph. The literal meaning of the Bible is found through centripetal reading [61]. The centralizing sense of context is shaped by centrifugal reading but informed by centripetal reading. Though these distinctions remind one of the difference between semiotics and semantics made by Benveniste, more immediately pertinent is the congruence of both kinds of reading in biblical research.

Style

Dispersed through *The Great Code* are observations about stylistic characteristics constituting the imaginative unity of the Bible, modes of conception and literary execution which are consistent and pervasive. I shall content myself with some superficial observations that deserve more extended analysis elsewhere.

While Biblical narrative is laconic, it makes use of repetition, either of phrases, keywords, images, actions, patterns. Images not only recur but are subtly modified so that the fiery stream of I Enoch 14 and Daniel 7:9, developments of Ezekiel 1, becomes the life giving water in the New Jerusalem and a vehicle signifying closeness to God. Recurrent symmetrical design is apparent in Judges. Israel is apostate, becomes enslaved, cries to God for help and a "Judge" is sent for deliverance. Stories fit a pattern. The evangelists continue by fitting the events of Jesus' life into the manner in which they read the Old Testament as prefiguring his life. This is repetitive symmetry. Perhaps even the arrangement of the New Testament followed this law: Gospels as Law, Acts, as History, Epistles as Prophecy, Revelation as Writings. And perhaps John's Gospel, an antitype of Genesis, may have been intended to be the first book of the Christian canon. Repetition and symmetrical design, accompanied by foreshadowing and heightening, are not decorative but semantic devices to illustrate the total control of God over history.

Occasionally motifs from later Old Testament books may explain literary usage of New Testament books. For instance, Frye noted that Malachi 4:4–6, the closing words of the Old Testament, urged the reader to recall the law of Moses and "wait for the return of Elijah" [179]. If, as critical scholarship generally agrees, Mark is temporarily the first Gospel, then the motif of Elijah, introduced and developed by Mark at the beginning of his Gospel, represents a commentary and a continuation of the Elijah motif in Malachi 4:4–6. Such a hypothesis gives foundation for the recurrence of Elijah, sometimes at improbable points, in the Gospel tradition. Mark may well be

beginning the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Elijah legend which itself is “a summary of the Word of God” [179].

The imposition of pattern or design, whether this be manifest in typology or the cycle of enslavement, promise and delivery or the paradigm of the Exodus which Frye says “is the only thing that really happens in the Old Testament” [171], manifests a significant Biblical attitude toward what we call history. History is didactic, it teaches. Therefore, its form is “historical reminiscence” [39]. The Bible manifests a calculated indifference to secular history, not because history is not a worthwhile academic enterprise but because this “violently partisan book” [40] focuses on moral interest and concern. Whereas the events of history are particularized and tied to one time and place, however exemplary their meaning, the Bible speaks of events and situations that are universal, that are always occurring. The literary offshoot is narrative characterized by “resonance.” A particular statement and context acquires a universal meaning. So the winepress of Isaiah 63 enters human consciousness through “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the literary world through *The Grapes of Wrath*. The cry to Pharaoh, “Let my people go,” becomes part of the black person’s vocabulary and a cry against all oppressors.

A more differentiated and influential resonance appears in two controlling Biblical metaphors: the legal metaphor and the royal metaphor. The legal metaphor goes all the way back to an assumed fall, one that is considerably developed in the Pseudepigraphical books, and portrays life as under trial and judgement. The loyal metaphor assumes that all are members of one body. Ignatius of Antioch then formulated this metaphor which received institutional fulfillment through the social bodies of “State and Church . . . [as] larger social bodies to which individuals are related as individual cells are to our own bodies” [99]. I leave to the reader’s pursuit the stimulating suggested reversal of the royal metaphor proposed by Frye and based on Galatians 2:20 [87-101; 228].

I shall bypass stylistic characteristics commonly noted by every literary critic, as, for example, paratactic structure, what Frye calls “leonine rhetoric” [212–13], a characteristic that gave what Auerbach called a tyrannical quality to the Bible, the pervasive use of irony, personification, hyperbole, metonymy, paranomasia, etc. One might however notice the irony of the first born in the Bible and the way in which this irony is pursued and completely reversed in the New Testament.

But one must mention parallelism and antithetical rhythm. Frye notes that the “second half of a parallel couplet is not intended to add to the sense” [210], a common enough observation. But ignoring this and adhering to a more literal twist, the redactor of Matthew misunderstood the text. Zechariah 9:9 reads: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold they King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” Mark, Luke and John quote the passage and clearly understand the passage as poetry. There is but one animal involved, the second part of the parallel couplet being merely a poetic repetition. Missing the point, the Mattaeian redactor has Jesus instructing his disciples to bring not only the ass but also a colt. Later overly literalistic interpreters find themselves in very good company.

Permeating Biblical style is the fusion of two logics—that of the actual course of events and the way in which the events are narrated, the narrative logic. The cleansing of the Temple occurs in the Synoptics at the end of the public life; in John, at the beginning. As Frye quite correctly points out, Jesus’ “act of cleansing the outer temple is of such symbolic importance that John places it at the very beginning of his ministry” [157]. A similar emphasis on Jesus’ displacing the Temple is present in Matthew’s description of the rending of the veil of the Temple (Matthew 27:51) which is, however, consigned to the moment of Jesus’ death. Mark handles the Temple displacement or transcendence in a still different fashion. No more than the artist can reproduce a sunlit lawn, writers cannot reproduce the activity of God. Thus they suggest and remind the reader of this activity by a certain code which constitutes a series of relationships in which the parts become

intelligible through the whole and the whole through the parts. The power of suggestion and recall inherent in this hermeneutic circle will be in direct proportion to its artistic cogency, a point that needs elaboration elsewhere.

Frye's reflections on the constitutive elements of imaginative unity are more than literary for they intend to make "the body of human imaginative response" [231] more accessible and compelling. This is an undeveloped theological arrangement to which one might hope Frye will turn his attention. In any case, Frye is proposing the possibility of what might be, a proposition with implications.

Implications

The community of vision suggested by Frye is based on the unity of the Bible. There is one vision. There is likewise an intrinsic unity between what we have been hitherto called Old and New Testaments. This suggests not merely the unity of the Bible but involves a completely different relationship of Jews to the latter half of the book and of Christians to the first part. Nor are this unity and its implications left unnoticed in the more technical works of Biblical scholars. One can no longer look at the New Testament as a self-sustaining and independent unity, with Judaism as a kind of background. Nor can Judaism ignore its continuation in at least one form in the latter part of the Bible.

For Biblical criticism there is a number of direct consequences. First, Frye, through polysemous meaning, reinstates the original literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical categories by incorporating them into a more differentiated and integrated interpreting consciousness. Secondly, Frye has made a very good case for the primacy of the literary operation in understanding the Bible (cf. P. Joseph Cahill, *Mended Speech: The Crisis of Religious Studies and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 115–27). Thirdly, this literary emphasis restores to the Bible its essential character as narrative and directs attention to narrative strategies. This suggests a transformation of the accepted History versus Kerygma approach that has so dominated not only Biblical studies but also theologies wishing to be Biblical. Clearly Frye's notion of the Bible as "historical reminiscence" [39], coupled with Robert Alter's classification of the Bible as "historicized prose fiction" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981, p. 24), needs more articulation and distinction. Here the literary critic and Biblical scholar may have to end up doing what might seem to be the work of historians. The Bible is indeed a form of historiography, though not a very simplified one.

There is yet a more complex implication not only for Biblical criticism but also for theological criticism. The History of Religions school with its disclosure of Hellenistic, Stoic, and late Palestinian influences on the Bible has occasionally fragmented, if not transformed, some Biblical categories. To read the Bible critically as an imaginative whole should enable the reader to come very close to what the Bible seems to be saying. The incorporation and transformation of outside influences leads to a semantic metamorphosis which, whatever else it may be, is peculiarly Biblical. The serious question is whether or not Christianity has really preserved the Biblical ideas or substituted for them alien ideas. In a much neglected observation, I. de la Potterie, in his gigantic and comprehensive work on truth in St. John (*La Verite dans Saint Jean*. Tome II. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977, pp. 1022–23), asked whether or not Christianity has perpetuated the Johannine idea of truth. Has, asks de la Potterie, the Greek notion of truth, colored by the dualism of Plato and Aristotle, so permeated Christianity that it has not been faithful to the word of God? This is a hermeneutical puzzle of considerable complexity, raised, of course, by Rudolf Sohm and Adolf Harnack years ago and taken up again by Bultmann under the rubric of constitutive versus consequent, and analyzed by the critical operations of *Sachexegese* and *Sachkritik*. From a slightly different perspective but with equally compelling results, Paul Ricoeur has pursued the critical path

backwards, from tertiary symbolism to primary symbolism, to reach the conclusion that a bibliography orientated doctrine of original sin is hardly Biblical. If literary criticism here cannot provide positive answers, it may at least raise legitimate if technical questions and may likewise exercise a carthartic function.

Conclusion

The Bible, both by historical circumstance and the influence of its language and vision, finds itself in a conventional category called literature, though it is obviously more than literature. The complex writing and redactional procedures that produced the Bible are reflected in the rules of the communities of which the writers and redactors were a significant part. These interpretative covenants were public property. Current readers, whether they be Biblical scholars, systematic theologians, literary critics or simply interested people are currently trained into certain ways of paying attention, into certain modes of interpretative strategies. Both text and reader emerge and develop in interpretative communities which themselves are governed by open, public, conventional and accessible points of view. The semantic competence required for interpretation resides not in a text but in a reader. Learned interpretative strategies form communities of interpretation, communities which are not shaped by physical juxtaposition, like roomers in a motel or even professors in a university, but by shared presuppositions and a shared common meaning. This is one kind of potential community.

But within this interpretive community there are levels. At the uppermost plain are those with highly differentiated levels of consciousness denoting high levels of integration. This is what Frye, I believe, calls the community of vision and the higher level of integration. Here there is palpably present what Josiah Royce called a “new and distinctive level of being” (*The Problem of Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 9). It is this new level of being that creates genuine community and distinguishes community from a casual group. Royce notes that a community is distinct from mere collections of people because of the community’s relation to a time order and to the process of history. It is a remembered past and a hoped for future that engenders common life and enables individuals to relate to each other and thus to form a community. Frye clearly hopes to present the substance of a vision which can create community. Elsewhere Frye has made it clear that the vision is always in front of us, never actually realized. I am inclined to think that this is perhaps the distinctive characteristic of the Biblical literature. This stands in stark contrast to other religious literature which suggests that one can attain complete identification with some transcendent reality here on earth. The danger in this latter proposal is that we end up with “inflated egos” rather than genuine holiness. It would, therefore, be interesting to see Northrop Frye come to grips with the diverse visions proposed by other religious traditions for it is quite clear that Frye wishes to present the substance of a vision which can create community.

No doubt Frye’s experience makes him aware that, in the words of Louis Dupré, precisely “in its integrating function . . . religion is most apt to degenerate into a power structure. Always tempted to take a short cut, religious man tends to destroy opposition rather than to integrate it under a more comprehensive absolute” (*The Other Dimension*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972), p. 19). This tendency, of course, is not confined to religions. Hence Frye’s almost wistful remarks about our tendency to build and perpetuate anxiety structures designed to inhibit liberty which he maintains is the “chief thing that the gospel has to bring to man” [232]. Elsewhere Frye has succinctly noted that the aim of criticism is ethical and participatory. Hence the Bible as literature is not something to be contemplated but a power to be assimilated and absorbed. Beyond what he has already written, I should like to hear more about how exactly this power is to be assimilated and absorbed. This, I think, is basically a question of spiritual implications. Frye’s

theological background puts him in the position of being capable of dealing with the question on a more intimate level than has thus far taken place.

No doubt the quest for a new level of being permeates the Bible. The first creation account (Genesis 1:4) begins with the creation of light by a transforming word. The final book ends in an idealized city, one which “has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Revelation 21:23). It is a city in “night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light. . . .” (Revelation 22:5). This metaphorical light, the transformation of all being is the consistent message of the apocalyptic prophets who people the Biblical theatre and who base their communications on a vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). Prophetic Apocalyptic blends vision, language, and community. Frye’s search for the imaginative unity of an ancient book rests upon the hope of a vision which may again create community. *The Great Code* is a remarkable book, a critical and pensive hope that the past is remembered, that the hoped for future somehow transform the present. Can the writer take the issue farther to see how hope copes with the powers of darkness?

4. Cameron, J. M. “A Good Read.” *New York Review of Books* 29 (15 April 1982): 28-31.

Evans-Pritchard once wrote, having in mind the fog in which, so he thought, the discussion of primitive religion had been plunged by Frazer, Durkheim, Marett, and others, that anyone who wanted to do fieldwork on this topic ought to have “a poetic mind which moves easily in images and symbols” (*Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 112). Such a prerequisite seems even more obviously needed for the study of the Bible. The materials in the Biblical writings (the Bible, in which I have to say about Frye’s book, is the Christian Bible, the so-called Old and New Testament, with the apocryphal—deuterocanonical—books, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, I and II Maccabees, and others) include most of the traditional kinds of oral and written work: epic, chronicle, folk tale, myth of origin, epithalamion, songs of exile, collections of proverbs, letters, biographies, proclamations of salvation, apocalyptic visions.

Put together in the King James Version, they are the most widespread cult object in North America, for the rest on or near every bedside table in hotel and motel. New vernacular translations of the original Hebrew and Greek continually appear and are brought in great quantities. What it all amounts to is hard to determine. University teachers report (Professor Frye confirms the report) that their pupils—sometimes their younger colleagues—don’t know the content of the Bible and don’t know how to read the perplexing volume. Off-the-cuff references, in lectures, to Joseph and his wonderful coat, the deliverance from Egypt, the theophany of the burning bush, the suffering servant of Isaiah, the parable of the laborers of the eleventh hour or the prodigal son, Paul’s shipwreck on the shores of Malta, rarely produce a response. We know there are those who scrutinize the text for news of the coming of Antichrist and Armageddon; but we may think this has a lot in common with the hunger for fantasies (worlds in collision, flying saucers, babies possessed by demons) and the vogue of such follies as palmistry and astrology.

The ignorance of the highly intelligent seeking an advanced education in the humanities presents the universities with a technical problem, namely, how to make the body of literature in English intelligible, for Langland, Chaucer, Milton, Blake, Hardy, Henry James, Joyce, cannot be fully grasped and valued by readers who have no serious acquaintance with the Bible (For example, *The Wings of the Dove* draws its pattern of feeling and not simply its title from Psalm 55: “For it is not an open enemy, that hath done me this dishonor: for then I could have borne it . . . But it was even thou, my companion: my guide, and mine own familiar friend . . . The words of his mouth were softer than butter . . . his words were smoother than oil” [Book of Common Prayer version]).

Northrop Frye meets Evans-Pritchard's requirement. He has "a poetic mind" and is as well the most ingenious and comprehensive of the formal critics writing in English today. As a systematic thinker about the theory and practice of his own art he has no equal. His *Anatomy of Criticism* tightened up the practice and enriched the vocabulary of literary studies. We can say he completed what had been begun by Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": the exploration of the literatures of the past as composing an order to be circumnavigated, surveyed, and accounted for. Frye is not just a highly intelligent man of letters, as Trilling was, or Edmund Wilson. His mind is synoptic and orders—sometimes to excess—its material; so far these powers have been shown most impressively in *Fearful Symmetry* his book on Blake, and in the exposition of forms, categories, ways of proceedings, in the *Anatomy*.

Frye's notion of criticism, as it is set out and practiced in the *Anatomy* is "the whole work of scholarship and taste concerned with literature which is a part of what is variously called liberal education, culture, or the study of the humanities." Such criticism has a variety of tasks; the most important is to give a voice to what is dumb, to make the verbal fiction itself deliver up its secrets. Imaginative literature is not (Frye argues) communication, but "a *disinterested* use of words"; poems are as silent as statues."

We have to proceed inductively, rummaging through the great heap that is literature. There may be difficulties over what things are to count as data for the critic, what verbal structures are to count as parts of the heap. The difficulties are overcome—the move in argument is like Burke's in justifying the authority of traditional institutions—by prescription, not by a discussion of conflicting value judgments. We can then look at the material under four headings: a theory of Modes, of Symbols, of Myths, of Genres. These broad topics are then divided under headings: the theory of Modes, for example, treated historically, divides into the mode of fiction in general, then into the tragic and comic fictional modes, and into thematic modes. A particular topic, imagery (which comes under the theory of Myths), for example, divides up into apocalyptic, demonic and analogical.

This doesn't do justice to the fineness of detail in the analysis, but it indicates Frye's mode of procedure, which he keeps to in *The Great Code*. He sometimes argues that the persistence over long periods, of similarities of structure in imaginative fictions means that underlying this unity of culture there "must" be "a common psychological inheritance." "Must" is a dire word in argument suggesting, a transcendental argument, as in Kant, from what is empirically given to what must be the case if this is given. The argument could be truistic, but then there would be no point in saying "must."

In the index of the *Anatomy* there are more references to the Bible than to any other set of books, except the poems and plays of Shakespeare. The Bible is followed closely by Aristotle, Plato, Dante, Milton, and Blake. Thus Frye is concerned with European literary culture in a broad sense; but his primary interest is in the imaginative, visionary expression of this way of taking the world, a way he believes belongs to the essence of humanity, not submerged in nature as are the other animals, but living in a universe of myth. The Bible is in the Christian era a principal contributor to our visionary account of the universe and of ourselves within it. If we are to move easily within our inherited culture, knowing how to read the Bible is not something we can do without.

The Bible, as a compilation of many books, as a sacred volume constituted by a canon or rule including this book, excluding that, and as a source of influence within literature, has plainly been squatting in Frye's path for a long time. Sensing in his pupils the lack of knowledge and competence we have already noticed, he has given a course on the Bible for many years, and some of *The Great Code* comes presumably from what was first roughed out for his fortunate students. The Bible is not, for him, just literature; it is *kerigma* proclamation of a saving message, not, Frye is anxious to make clear, as expressing or being a foundation for a doctrine, but *kerigma* nonetheless; what this implies, we must presently ask. Its suitability as material for commentary by the critic and

the theorist of criticism lies in its use of so many literary modes, in its offering in rich confusion metaphor, metonymy, symbol, analogy, and other figures of language in its complete account, as it were, of human history and of human mind and self-reflection: “creation, exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse.”

The program of *The Great Code* is most conveniently stated in *Fearful Symmetry*.

The basis of the Bible is, like that of the epic, religious and historical saga concerned with anthropomorphic gods and theomorphic men, part of it legendary history and part prophetic vision. But the Bible is neither a single work of art like the *Iliad*, nor an expanded one like *Mahabharata*: it is the historical product of a visionary tradition. It records a continuous reshaping of the earlier and more primitive visions, and as it goes on it becomes more explicitly prophetic, until the confused legends of an obscure people take the form of the full cyclic vision of fall, redemption and apocalypse. The Old Testament begins with an account of an escape from Egypt into Canaan led by Joshua, and ends with the prophetic allegorical recreation of this event: the escape of the imagination from a “furnace of iron” into a City of God through the power of a divine humanity or Messiah.

The Gospels consolidate this vision of the Messiah into the vision of Jesus, who has the same name as Joshua, and the proof of the events in Jesus’ life, as recorded in the Gospels, is referred to contemporary evidence but to what the Old Testament prophets had said would be true of the Messiah. The imaginative recreation of Old Testament visions in the New Testament, reaching its climax in the dense mosaic of allusions and quotations in the Apocalypse, merely completes a process which goes on to a considerable extent within the Old Testament itself.

Frye is able to take the Bible in English as an established fact that doesn’t in practice raise severe problems for the critic whose Hebrew and Greek may not reach professional standards. Judaism and Christianity have always been hospitable to the idea of translation. In this they differ from Islam: the Koran is tied to Arabic in a way the Jewish and Christian Scripture are not tied to Hebrew and Greek. There have been four great translations: the LXX (the Septuagint, for the Greek speaking Jews of the pre-Christian diaspora), Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, the King James Bible (Authorized Version), and Luther’s Bible. (The best of the modern English translations, the Revised Standard Version, is closely tied to the King James.) We have to keep the original languages in mind, and profit from what the specialists tell us; but in practice it has to be assumed that a critical reading of the classical translations is sufficient for the study of the whole Bible. Specialized scholars don’t go in for this; only theologians and exceptionally vigorous literary scholars have the courage to attempt synthetic and synoptic accounts.

The central idea of *The Great Code* is that of the many ways of reading to which the Bible invites us one is of capital importance: it has to be read typologically, not because this is an interesting pattern after we have given the kaleidoscope a shake, but because this is how the Biblical authors, in the main, wrote.

To take the most majestic of the types, the “And God said, ‘let there be light’” (Genesis 1:3) has its antitype the prologue to the Fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word. . . . All things were made through him. . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1–4). The Exodus is so much the dominant collection of types for the entire Bible that Frye can even write “that mythically the Exodus is the only thing that really happens in the Old Testament.” Moses’ organization of the Israelites into twelve tribes finds its antitype in the twelve apostles; the passage through the Red Sea signifies baptism; manna signifies the Eucharist; the Law is given from Sinai and thus the most celebrated collection of moral counsels in the New Testament is the “Sermon on the Mount.” In all the Gospels the passion and death of Jesus are centered upon (despite the slight

difference of timing between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel) the Passover; the Last Supper is a Passover meal, the Crucifixion is the journey through the desert, the Resurrection is victory over Israel's enemies.

This is how the Bible has always been treated liturgically, in both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, though some of what is for the Christians realized antitype is for Jewish believers still to come (compare, for example, how Isaiah 53 would be read by the two sets of believers). The type-antitype relation is brought out plainly in the prayers and ritual actions of the Seder; among the Christian liturgies perhaps the most magnificent celebration of the relation is in the "Exsultet" of the Holy Saturday liturgy; this contains the famous "*O certe necessarium Adae peccatum. . . . O felix culpa. . . . O vere beata nox. . . .*" (O truly necessary sin of Adam. . . . O happy fault. . . . O night blessed indeed. . . .).

Why the typological tradition should, despite its liturgical repetition, have for so many dropped out of mind is a many-sided question. Perhaps an important cause has been a presupposition, sometimes stated, sometimes taken for granted, of much liberal Protestant work on the Bible: that the Bible records a progressive change from the primitive and barbaric if monolatrous, society reflected in the Pentateuch to the ethical monotheism of the Prophets, and then on to the pure ethical doctrine that can be extracted from the New Testament once it is purged of apocalyptic discourse and once it is separated (as by Matthew Arnold in *Literature and Dogma* and *St. Paul and Protestantism*) from its dead carapace of Hebraicisms.

In placing typology at the foundation of his reading of the Bible Frye has done much to rob the presupposition of its plausibility. And it is the types seeking, as it were, their antitypes, antitypes turning into types that have other antitypes, the whole to-and-fro movement of a searching reading of the Bible, that makes it proper to describe the volume as *The Great Code* (thought there is a further implication that the Bible is a code for the deciphering of the secular literature into which it has entered in its text and through its spirit).

Typology gives us only the skeleton of Scripture. There are many poetic devices that make up the density and richness of the Bible. Metaphor is picked out by Frye as one of the determining modes of Biblical discourse. We have the imagery of Eden-Paradise, an oasis imagery of trees and water, Frye remarks, having a special charm for those who were originally desert nomads. The Bible moves between the images of pastoral life, shepherds, sheep, good shepherds, lost sheep, and those of the city, Jerusalem, the city of David, the place of the Temple, consigned to desecration and destruction, the place where God's wrath and justice are manifested in destruction and reconstruction; and finally "the Jerusalem above. . . . and she is our mother" (Galatians 4:26). The identification involved in metaphor is a curious, even a troublesome problem, and what Frye has to say deserves careful thought; he is certainly right in resisting moves to make metaphor no more than condensed simile or a mere metonymic reminder.

Frye's assembly of considerations and arguments, praisings and blamings, aphorisms, Chestertonian jokes, *obiter dicta* needs and will receive through examination and criticism from scholars and critics. Here I confine myself to raising one question, a fundamental once, as I believe, that is forced upon us by Frye: what is the place of the Bible in human life? What is the Bible *about*? What is the connection of what is said by the Biblical writers with the world of human history? These are simply ways of breaking down the question generated by the collision of Frye's view with the view of the believer. I don't assert that "the view of the believer" is something transparent and easily stated; but we have in some way to come to terms with it, precisely because Frye insists that the Bible is *kerygma*, the proclamation of a saving message, a collection of the oracles of God. This is not what the nineteenth-century liberal (Arnold is again the apposite figure) thought the Bible was; and it is not how students of "the Bible as literature" have taken it.

I understand Frye's argument in the following way. The Bible has the structure of two mirrors, each reflecting the other; and what the Biblical writers say refers in a primary sense, even where the intention of the writer seems historical, to other parts of the Bible. It is isolated from ordinary questions about truth and fact—to raise such question is a solecism into which both fundamentalists and radical critics fall. Its function is not to point beyond itself, and to summon us to faith, with its conjoined virtues of humility and obedience, but to elevate us beyond faith to the higher life of vision. Our encounter with the Bible can induce in us a version of what Frye calls "upward metamorphosis," the making of all things new spoken about at the end of the Apocalypse.

. . . the Bible deliberately blocks off the sense of the referential from itself: it is not a book pointing to a historical presence outside it, but a book that identifies itself with that presence. At the end the reader, also, is invited to identify himself with the book. Milton suggests that the ultimate authority in the Christian religion is what he calls the Word of God in the heart, which is superior even to the Bible itself, because for Milton this "heart" belongs not to the subjective reader but to the Holy Spirit. That is, the reader completes the visionary operation of the Bible by throwing out the subjective fallacy along with the objective one. The apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared.

As no one knows better than Frye, the questions that press upon us once we reflect on referential, descriptive, and other uses of language, on the logical status of fiction, the sense and testability of particular historical statements, on metaphor and metonymy, on the connections of sense with reference (to use Frege's standard example, "the evening star" and "the morning Star" differ in sense but have the same reference), and other topics, are many and teasing. In most kinds of writing there is no need to be wary and to raise such questions, but here we must. We read, for example, that (Frye is following Aristotle) "History makes particular statements," whereas "Poetry expresses the universal in the event, the aspect of the event that makes it an example of the kind of thing that is always happening"; and later that "A myth is designed not to express a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to that one situation"; and then we come to the conclusion that "Its [the myth's] truth is inside its structure, not outside."

One can't read this without raising questions about "inside" and "outside," and about how we get, as we surely must, from our knowledge of particular happenings to the kind of thing that is always happening. I think we are meant to think that Frye has clarified a set of problems, whereas he has complicated very greatly these problems and added a quite unnecessary one, namely, how the truth of a myth, at least where it is to be considered "poetic"—and Frye thinks "the Biblical myths are closer to being poetic than to being history" (the truth I take it being the universal)—is *inside* the structure of the myth. Does this mean we mustn't fidget and ask silly questions about the archaeology of Ur of the Chaldees or Jericho or about whether or not there was an Exodus from Egypt? Plainly these are not the only questions, and perhaps not the most important questions, about the Biblical stories; but they can't be proscribed.

Immediately after this excursus on myth and history, Frye stresses the impossibility of taking the Bible as through and through poetic; if we were to do this "we should have no criteria for distinguishing . . . Jesus from the prodigal son of his own parable." This seems right. But once we have allowed the distinction between fiction and fact, between poetry and history, to be made, then it seems inadequate to argue "that if anything historically true is in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true but for different reasons." What can these be? Well, they "have something to do with spiritual profundity or significance." This seems weak, even when Frye elucidates spiritual profundity by referring to the admittedly poetic and unhistorical book of Job or to the heroic stories of enslavement and deliverance, stories in which "priority is given to the mythical structure or

outline of the story,” in Judges. Frye’s emphasis throughout is that if we want to understand the Bible, we can only do so by examining the intentions of the Biblical writers themselves. If we do this, then we seem forced to conclude that the historical and, if we must use the phrase, the spiritually profound are conceived by them otherwise than Frye supposes. The catharsis, or whatever it is Frye thinks to be brought about by a faithful reading of the Bible, is connected in some cases with its reference to what lies outside the poetic myth or the literary aspect of the structure of typology. There are many instances of this. I choose only one: Paul’s insistence on the non-mythical, historical, brutally factual character of the Crucifixion. When he writes (I Corinthians 1:23) that “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,” we may gloss what he says as follows. To the Gentiles the preaching is foolish; for the Greek world is full of stories about dying, suffering, and resurrected gods, but these things happen *in illo tempore* (as Mircea Eliade puts it), not “under Pontius Pilate.” As to the Jews, here is the Messiah of promise, this scarecrow figure on a gibbet; and for this to be a stumbling block it has to be as historical as the Roman procurator under whom the Crucifixion happened.

I don’t here want to dispute over Paul’s claim, but simply to note it; for if we are to accept Frye’s view that the Bible has a double-mirror structure, and that this structure represents the intentions of the authors, then we have also to note that here the intention is to use the structure and at the same time to go beyond it: to take the crucified one as the antitype of the figure in Isaiah 53 (“he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our inequities,” v. 5) and also to assert that the antitype is to be identified with a given man, Jesus of Nazareth, who belongs to history in the same way as do Paul and Gamaliel. What Frye a little contemptuously calls the scholars’ “obsession with the Bible’s historicity” is perfectly justified by the ethos and concerns of some of the Biblical writers themselves. Whether or not there is good evidence for what the writers assert as historical is another, an ideologically independent question. But they do make such assertions, and stress that their historicity is crucially significant.

There are many other difficulties in Frye’s treatment of a number of questions. He falls too easily into persuasive definition: e.g., “there is no real evidence for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament”—a bullying way of saying that Frye doesn’t think the evidence outside the New Testament is sufficient. There are several loose—too loose—generalizations about Marxism, of the kind that have been repeated from author to author during the past fifty years: e.g. “The burning-bush contract introduces a revolutionary quality into the Biblical tradition, and its characteristics persist through Christianity, through Islam and survive with little essential change [persuasive definition again] in Marxism.”

But this is a magnificent book, a necessary recall to some fundamental principles of Biblical interpretation and a collection of problems and questions of the first importance for critics, Biblical scholars, and the educated public in general. If I were asked to pick out the best thing in the book, I should choose the three pages [123–125] on Ecclesiastes, perhaps the most misunderstood and under-appreciated book in the Bible. Frye shows that the weary cynicism often attributed to the author is a misreading. “Only when we realize that nothing is new can we live with an intensity in which everything becomes new.” I ended my second reading of *The Great Code* with feelings of pleasure and envy: Frye’s architectonic power is so astonishing.

(It is a pleasure to handle a book so well printed and of such handsome appearance. I have noticed only two misprints, on pp. 36 and 213. There is what I assume to be an incomplete sentence (“The whole complex . . . witch-burning and the like”) on p. 163.)

5. Crossan, John Dominic. *Commonweal* 109 (10 September, 1982): 475–9.

The critical study of the Christian Bible has operated since its inception within a predominately historical paradigm. Source criticism emphasized the genetic relationship within and between texts. Form criticism looked for the sociological setting from which such forms derived. Redaction criticism presumed the use of sources and focused on how the final writer used those given materials. It is interesting that the data so brilliantly illuminated by those methods *could* have been seen just as easily in terms of process as of product. That whole vast research *can* be, and has been, used to isolate and venerate either the original or the final text, but it *can* also be used to contemplate the total hermeneutical process from original to final text, giving no ultimate honor to either product but to the developmental process itself. What remains thereafter as normative or at least provocative is a continuing and contemporary process rather than any text, original, intermediate, or final, as fixed and dated products. Such could be but it is not yet how biblical study is taken.

There are, instead, two major reactions to the exclusivity of historical interests in biblical studies. One comes from within the ranks of scholars trained in the traditional methods of philology, archaeology, and history. Examples are Daniel and Aline Patte's use of French structuralism in *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice* (1978) and Robert Polzin's use of Russian formalism in *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (1980). The second reaction comes from scholars trained in literary criticism and deliberately invading a territory where even the religion and literature analysts have feared to tread. Examples are Frank Kermode's theoretical and philosophical mediations in *The Genesis of Secrecy* (1979) and Robert Alter's detailed close readings in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981). And to this latter group must now be added Northrop Frye, taking his title from Blake's claim that "The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art." Frye asks programmatically, "Why does this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit there inscrutably in the middle of our cultural heritage like the 'great Boyg' or sphinx in *Peer Gynt*, frustrating all our efforts to walk around it?"

"The Bible is . . . a pattern of commandments, aphorisms, epigrams, proverbs, parables, riddles, pericopes, parallel couplets, formulaic phrases, folktales, oracles, epiphanies, *Gattungen*, *Logia*, bits of occasional verse, marginal glosses, legends, snippets from historical documents, laws, letters, sermons, hymns, ecstatic visions, rituals, fables, genealogical lists, and so on almost indefinitely." This is one aspect of the biblical sprawl but the other is just as important: "Literally, the Bible is a gigantic myth, a narrative extending over the whole of time from creation to apocalypse, unified by a body of recurring imagery that 'freezes' into a single metaphor cluster." Frye's own work is not structured by either the Bible's internal generic diversity or its external linear narrativity but is presented as a giant chiasm in which *The Order of Words*, subdivided as Language, Myth, Metaphor, Typology, reverses itself as *The Order of Things*, subdivided as Typology, Metaphor, Myth, Language.

Language opens and closes the book. "Language I" proposes the possibility of a "history of *language*," that is the translatable sense in words that cuts across the variety of tongues (*languages*) employed. This history—in effect, the story of emergent Western consciousness—moves from the "this is that" of hieroglyph and metaphor, through the "this for that" of abstract metonymic language, and into the demotic or descriptive ("just the facts please") mode that dominates modern discourse. (The bias for the latter mode—which places, us *outside* events—accounts in part for the difficulty in assimilating biblical meanings.) But if these phases begin successively, for us they remain simultaneous modal options—with poetry lying closest to the creative sources of language. It follows, then, that "it is the primary function of literature, more particularly of poetry, to keep re-creating the first or metaphorical phase of language during the domination of the later phases."

Even though the biblical idiom does not coincide with any single mode of language—and in fact represents a fourth option, the kerygmatic or revelatory mode (the theory of phases breaks down badly here)—still, notes Frye, metaphor "is not an accidental ornament of Biblical language, but one of its controlling modes of thought."

Myth “means, first of all, *mythos*, plot, narrative, or in general the sequential ordering of words.” “Myth I” then asks, “Granted that the narratives in the Bible are myths in the sense we have give the word, whether they are histories or fictions, are they histories or fictions?” Frye struggles boldly with that question but emerges slightly limping in the dawn. On the one hand: “if anything historically true is in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true in the Bible, but for different reasons.” On the other: “while reading Biblical myth poetically is a more liberal exercise than reading it as factual history, trying to reduce the Bible entirely to the hypothetical basis of poetry clearly will not do.”

It is possible that the Bible’s constant frustration of our attempt to distinguish absolutely between history and theology, letter and metaphor, fact and fiction, teaches us something fundamental about that distinction itself, namely, that where the depth is deep enough or the fight is fierce enough we can never tell where the distinguishing line actually is? This seems likely.

“Myth II” surveys the individual or internal units which are modeled on the external or overarching construction of “the entire Bible, viewed as a ‘divine comedy,’ contained within a U-shaped story . . . in which man . . . loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation.” But, of course, that inaugural question from “Myth I” (fact or fiction?) haunts the corridors of both small and large structures, and the larger the biblical structure the greater the haunting presence becomes.

In “Metaphor I” the problem of distinguishing “literal” and “metaphorical” is solved by conflation: “the primary and literal meaning of the Bible, then, is its centripetal or poetic meaning” [61]. In “Metaphor II” five different metaphorical structures are traced throughout the Bible. But the paradisaal (trees, water), pastoral (flocks, herds), agricultural (harvest, vintage), urban (Jerusalem, Temple), and human (marriage) metaphorical clusters have both an ideal or apocalyptic aspect and an evil or demonic counterpart. It is this dialectical patterning that supports internally the somewhat external or canonical unity imposed on the disparate biblical materials from a later situation.

Typology is the book’s hinge. “Typology I” notes the classic principle that the New Testament was concealed in the Old, while the Old was revealed in the New. This gives an historical dimension to biblical typology, and in “Typology II” Frye proposes “seven main phases: creation, revolution or exodus (Israel in Egypt), law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel and apocalypse” which follow one another in succession, “each phase being a type of the one following it and as antitype of the one preceding it.”

The book’s structure is chiasmic but with an abcd/dcba rather than an abc/d/cba construction. This entails the book’s reversing itself not around some emphasized center but around a black hole or better, a white page. I finished the book with an acute sense of disappointment, as of something missing that should have been there. Maybe this absence is no more than the promised second volume. I fear, however, that the absence is more profound than that. We can study the Bible *as* literature, and it has been done. We can study the Bible *and* literature and Frye has probably done it here as well as it can be done. But what if the Bible’s heart is the combination of religion and history and literature? What happens when religion appears as a frustratingly indistinguishable amalgam of all three phenomena in a book? If that is the triple challenge posed by the Christian Bible to any serious reader and not just to believer alone, then emphasizing only religion, or only history, or only literature, or even any two of those aspects, will not meet the Bible on its own terms as the great code of all three in combination, as the great roundness of religion, history, and literature.

6. Dudek, Louis, “The Bible as Fugue: Theme and Variation.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1982–83): 128–35.

Despite his outspoken lucidity (“the fear of heresy . . . the deadliest social psychosis in history,” p. 11), his academic humility (“what I briefly attempted myself in the *Anatomy of Criticism*,” [224]), and his colloquial casualness at times (“It makes good sense to call the Bible and the person of Christ by the same name,” [77]), there is a powerful aura of something covert and withheld in the writing of Northrop Frye, a cloud of awesome implication that remains forever on the horizon and which leads to much misunderstanding of his meaning.

Scholars and critics who were impressed by his mythic approach to literature were hardly aware, for example, that the college library which he had redecorated and reorganized was gradually becoming a cloister, and that the architectural extensions of this structure were taking the form of a church. Moreover, it was not merely a church among the other churches, but one that was to replace the rest as the one “definitive” structure (p. 226). That mythopoeic criticism pointed to “a veiled Christianity”—that it was in fact “the myth of the Christian religion” in a unique Protestant form—I argued in an obscure essay in 1963, to the dismay of some literati (see *Delta* 22 (October 1983), 26. The essay is reprinted in my *Selected Essays and Criticism*. Ottawa, 1978, pp. 175–79). Now here is Frye in *The Great Code* to tell us that “in a sense all my critical work, beginning with the study of Blake published in 1947, and formulated ten years later in *Anatomy of Criticism*, has revolved around the Bible” [xiv]. I should say here that when the implications concerned mainly the teaching and interpretation of literature I was highly critical of the theory. Now that they concern mainly the reading and understanding of the Bible I feel much less so. The Bible to me is a collection of archaeological texts of great interest, on the same shelf with Greek philosophical writings, with “wagon loads of Egyptian papyrus” and “mountains of cuneiform tablets” (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, trans. William Neil [New York 1980], p. 201), with the Upanishads and Vedas, the Chinese classics, the Talmud and the Koran. It is only one among the world’s sacred and philosophical archives, illuminating various cultures and periods of human thought, but not a privileged text nor a central revelation.

I have an enormous admiration for Frye’s critical genius, his gift for theoretical interpretation, and his scholarship, and yet I can only approach him as I would a master chess-player: I must analyze his game. Not to do so would be to resign from the start, or to fail to test his particular strength.

As with myth criticism in general, the implications of *The Great Code* loom far in the background and most readers are likely to avoid looking in that direction. For there are some dark and menacing shadows. What are we to make, for example, of the off-hand definition of human beings as “psychotic apes who want to kill” [211]? Or the statement that mythology is not a direct response to the natural environment; “it is part of the imaginative insulation that separates us from that environment” [37]? Is mythology then a kind of delusion? What is Frye’s view of objective nature, of the natural world we live in? Deeper still, in matters of faith Frye stands far outside any traditional view as regards God. Following Blake, he sees gods as “representative metaphors” [31]. In this view God does not exist in an objective sense as a being outside ourselves. He is really part of the verbal and mythical structure which is Frye’s exclusive concern: an idea in a pattern. Frye says that “even the existence of God is an inference from the existence of the Bible: in the beginning was the Word” [61]. Or stronger still: “God condemns himself to death” when he “transforms himself into a Word of God” [111]. (Both these statements are conditional, preceded by “we could almost say” and “we come to the possibility,” but they point to the central issue. It is what I mean by implication.) Even Christ exists in this metaphoric sense; Christ is identified metaphorically with the Bible [11]. Thus: “Ezekiel seems to present us with a profoundly neurotic God who keeps desperately punishing his own people in order to reassure himself of the reality of his own existence” [218]. As a result, a profound revision of the traditional view of man’s relation to the

divine emerges: “The whole metaphorical picture of the relation of mankind and God has to be reversed. Man does not stand in front of an invisible but objective power making conciliatory gestures of ritual and moral obligation to him” [34]. The implications of this conclusion are immense, as we shall see.

In the same way radical revisions of many aspects of orthodox Christianity are required by Frye. The traditional idea of hell, “the nightmare of a hell in unending time after death,” he calls a “foul doctrine” [74]. But, then, neither is heaven out there waiting for us. He argues that “in the Bible the invisible world is not morally thought of as a separate and higher order of reality” [124]—as though the 2000-year-old reading of the New Testament had been a misreading or misinterpretation. The Kingdom of Heaven means “the eternal and infinite . . . now and here made real, an actual present and an actual presence.” And this kingdom is either within you or among you, “but in either case means here not there” [130]. Astonishingly, a this-worldly vision emerges from a centuries-old “other worldly” religion. Such are the transformations of Frye’s mythological reading. Almost every traditional term gets retranslated by this new method into some new formulation. The doctrine of original sin, so deep-dyed in old theology, becomes “fear of freedom” [232], that is, fixation on dogma or attachment to specific belief and doctrine. (Chess notation here: exclamation point!). Repentance becomes “an enlarged vision of the dimensions of human life” [130]. Prophecy is “the creative imagination” (p. 128). The Second Coming was not to be “simply a future event,” nor did the end of the world mean “that the world was coming to an end”—it meant “the destruction of the way of seeing that order” [135, 136].

All this is very puzzling unless we look at the thesis of the book and the epistemology that underlies it. Frye’s central hypothesis, that myth is meaning, bypasses the two approaches to the Bible that have given so much trouble in the past. What Matthew Arnold called “the fact”—the fact that “failed us”—that is, the literalness of the historical account, the notion that “it actually happened” thus and so, is of no relevance in Frye’s argument. The historical and cultural approach gave him no “clues” [xvii]. The second approach, the doctrinal, which concerns creed and belief, he tell us “was relatively useless” [xviii]. Thus the contentions of the Catholic and Protestant churches throughout the centuries, as well as the historicist assaults on the Bible over the past three hundred years, are set aside as no longer relevant [226–7]. In effect they have missed the meaning of the Bible.

Frye’s approach to the Bible is through “imaginative criteria”; that is, we get at its meaning by considering the shaping myth that holds the Bible together as “a single gigantic complex metaphor” [63]. Quite explicitly: “the present book takes myth and metaphor to be the true literal bases” [64]. Myth itself is the meaning. It constitutes a *kerigma*, or proclamation; it offers a “revelation” that then stands self-evident, as the gospel or message.

We get to the unified myth through what is called typology. Christianity from the beginning, even in the very writing of the Gospels and Epistles, saw the events of the New Testament as prophetic fulfillments of the Old: such parallels are metaphors taking literally, that is, the early Christians took the parallels as literal prophecies, as did most medieval and Renaissance interpreters—but for Frye this belief in literalness is merely incidental. The metaphorical process which so takes over the mind is the key to larger meaning. The Bible as unified myth is typology carried to its ultimate structural completeness.

Thus we have a number of “interchangeable synonyms for home of the soul” [171]: Eden, the Promised Land, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the Kingdom of God. All these are one and the same at the metaphorical level. In the same way, the Bible as a whole consists of “seven main phases”: creation, exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, apocalypse [106]. Each of these is a variation on a U-shaped story, a descent or dramatic fall, such as the story of Israel in Egypt, of the Babylonian captivity, and a return to grace or good fortune; with the exception that the last of these, the

Gospels and Apocalypse, offer a permanent return, in the person of Christ. This series of identical events, “each phase being a type of the one following it and an antitype of the one preceding it,” are much like a Great Fugue or series of variations on a theme; as Frye puts it, “each phase is not an improvement on its predecessor but a wider perspective on it” [106].

But if the Bible begins with the loss of Eden and ends in a permanent return with the coming of Christ, as tradition has long maintained, the meaning of Christ here, which is now the name, as we see, for the Bible as a whole, will not be as cozy and familiar by any means. When Frye tells us that the “recurring imagery” just summarized “‘freezes’ into a single metaphor cluster, the metaphors all being identified with the body of the Messiah, the man who is all men” [224], he is referring to a *vision*, in the Blakean sense, which he offers as the ultimate “revelation” of the Bible. This is a vision of reality beyond time and space, in which the personal ego is dissolved, and all mankind is identified as one. All distinctions between men vanish, and even the distinction between God and man disappears: “the master-slave duality, of which the creature-creator duality is perhaps a projection,” is at last broken and we reach a completely open perspective, beyond all distinctions of faith and doctrine [232]. This “open community of vision,” described as “a still greater community than faith” [226-7], is in fact a common element in all the great world religions—Frye actually calls it “the quality of all serious religions” [232]—however it may be belied by the history of these religions.

But how, at last, do we get to such an open vision through a religion whose essential characteristic, whether in the Judaic or Christian form, has been an exclusive conviction of its own truth and a fierce intolerance for any difference? Frye grants that “there is a traditional prejudice against the disinterested in Christianity,” but he believes that “this can be transcended too” [223]. Actually, the most striking feature of Judaism from the time of Moses on has been its intolerance toward the other gods, in a part of the world generally tolerant of variety. Thus Deuteronomy: “You shall demolish all the sanctuaries where the nations whose place you are taking worship their gods. . . . You shall pull down their altars and break their sacred pillars . . . and thus blot out the name of them from that place.” “You shall not leave any creature alive. You shall annihilate them” (Deuteronomy 12:1-3; 20:16-18). This characteristic was certainly passed on to Christianity—as anti-semitism and as “the deadliest social psychosis” [111]—and then from Christianity to Islam: such is the sad history of these religions.

How the highly tolerant or ecumenical theory which Frye proposes has emerged, a theory which ironically enough must also make some claim to being “definitive” now [226-7], may perhaps be understood by seeing it in the context of responses to rationalism—and in fact accommodation to rationalism—since the eighteenth century. William Blake the poet was himself a part of such a reaction and accommodation. In general I see this as a continuing “Save-the-Bible” movement, gradually adapting the great book to current ways of thought; most remarkably so with Frye, who tells us that if we now think, in the modern way, that “God is Dead” and we know only an existential this-worldly reality, then this is what the Bible has meant all along—with the proviso that Christ is still at the heart of it.

So I run across a contemporary scholar writing about this process in the period of Romanticism:

Not long after Enlightenment scepticism had discredited the Bible as divine revelation, the esthetic appreciations of Biblical poetry by Herder, by Robert Lowth, and eventually by Chateaubriand prepared the way for a partial rehabilitation of the scriptures. Seen by the romantics as a record of primitive poetic myths, and not merely as the tool of Christian autocrats, the Bible came to be respected along with other great epic-religious cycles as an expression of the folk wisdom of the collective unconscious. So the romantics tended to

ignore the Bible's distinctively Judeo-Christian components—the history of the Jewish nation and the life of Christ. They responded primarily to those Biblical books that seemed to coincide with the major phases of the generalized myth of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, which, nourished by cabalistic, illuminist, and Neoplatonic sources, pervaded the late eighteenth century (Lawrence M. Porter, reviewing Abraham Albert Avni, *The Bible and Romanticism* [The Hague, 1969], in *Comparative Literature* 24 [Winter 1972]: 90).

The phrase “generalized myth” is particularly apt and appropriate here. But clearly such generalization has been going on for some time. The father of contemporary Protestant theology is said to be Friedrich Schleiermacher, about the year 1880. I find in his *Monologen* a passage which contains, one might say, the tiny seed of Frye's view of Bible mythology and the very essence of his vision. Schleiermacher refers to those who aspire to personal immortality after death as deluded dreamers—somewhat as Frye holds *passant* that the question of immortality after death is “up for grabs” [230]—and then Schleiermacher observes that “their mythology is more profound than they,” a statement entirely in the spirit of Frye. He then goes on to say that the “inner process . . . this spiritual life” with its reflections on the soul and supernal realities is but a product of imagination: “and the realm of shadows may serve me here on earth as archetype of reality.” And, finally, “even now the spirit spans the world of time. Eternity is in sight thereof, and the celestial rapture of immortal choirs. Wherefore begin at once your life eternal in the constant contemplation of your own true being” (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Monologen* [1800], trans. as *Schleiermacher's Soliloquies* [Chicago, 1926], p. 25).

This beautiful thought corresponds perfectly with Frye's conception of reality and vision in *The Great Code*. But it is also a very modern idea. As we know, the general tendency to extract this kind of contemporary truth from the Bible is to “demythologize” it, to free it, not only of historical baggage and constricting creeds, but also of the mythological accretions that makes its current acceptance difficult. One such effort in our time is the work of Rudolf Bultmann, whose important essay of the subject, “New Testament and Mythology,” dates from 1943 (Hans Werner Bartsch, ed., *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller [London, 1964], 1, 1–44). Bultmann appears very dramatically in *The Great Code* at the end of chapter 1, and suitably so since the program of “demythologizing” appears to be the very opposite of Frye's. He is effectively refuted on pages 41–42, where Frye says that, if we remove myth from the Bible, “there will be, quite simply, nothing left of the Gospels at all.” For Frye, as we know, the myth precisely is “the universal” and the vehicle of meaning [46].

Bultmann, however, gives us a good deal of context for this debate. It was Adolf Harnack, in 1904, who significantly reduced the Bible to pure kerygma or teaching, “a few basic principles of religion and ethics.” (ibid., 1, 13). Again, Wilhelm Dilthey, in 1923, argued for validating biblical myths; “once they are re-interpreted as statements of universal validity they express the highest living form of all history” (ibid., 1, 24). And Bultmann sees his own work, in this regard, as being identical with what Kierkegaard and Heidegger have properly “demythologized,” is “a revelation of the meaning of universal reality” (ibid., 1, 25). This idea, of course, is precisely identical in import with Frye's in *The Great Code*, and that brings us, finally, to a striking paradox.

“Demythologizing” and pure “myth as meaning” become one and the same. For after all a myth is only a kind of idea: it is a mode of generalization, a concrete universal. It is astonishing to discover, for example, that all the mythic elements of the Bible are seen in *The Great Code* as originating in reductive beginnings. Thus, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is “obviously connected with sex” [109]. The idea of transcendence and of “two worlds” is traced to “waking from sleep and going back to sleep” [108]. God himself “as creator is a projection from the fact that man makes things” [112]. Also, God “derives from the master-slave relationship” [232]; and Jesus

as king and also as servant is “intended to resolve the master-slave dialectic” [91]. Furthermore, the Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit are “probably the sky, the sun, and the air” [156]. Thus, from an epistemological point of view, the mythic elements arise by a metaphorical generalization or representation of the natural world and of human experience. But this metaphorical process leads to profusion and multiplicity, as the etymology of every language reveals. Frye’s effort to unify the metaphorical edifice so that a single metaphor, in the person of Christ, stands at the point of pyramid, results in a curious reversal.

For one thing, the entire system, which began by dissociation from doctrine, inevitably presents itself as doctrine at the end of the work. Since language has passed through three phases—the metaphoric, the metonymic, and the descriptive—and since the Bible uses all three but actually adopts “a fourth form of expression,” for which the words *keerygma* (from Bultmann), proclamation, and revelation must be used, the content of this revelation is presented as a reality to be accepted, a reality revealed. One cannot read the final pages of *The Great Code* without the feeling of a doctrine emerging from the exposition.

But further still, and most astonishingly, when all the mythologizing procedures culminate in a single myth, the myth of Christ and the vision of identity, it is clear that the myth itself has become pure idea. It is the idea of human community, of love, and of a higher order of consciousness. This must be so because all myths are the image forms of complex ideas, they are man’s first grasp of the possibility of knowledge in language; and when they are “boiled down” or unified in the kind of analytic process which this book undertakes, the result is an idea. Bultmann who “demythologizes” and Frye who would have the Bible pure mythology are saying pretty much the same thing.

To summarize, then, I would say that Frye has presented a secular and highly enlightened vision of reality—roughly Hegelian in character—as though it had evolved or had always been present in the Judaeo-Christian tradition; it is a vision which really takes us beyond religion, since it is entirely free of any faith or doctrine as usually understood. The same vision, however, can be reached by other roads, for example, by the road of Greek rationality and tolerance; but whether we take this road or the mythological one, such a vision can be reached only by individuals who are caring enough, self-critical and patient enough, to achieve that high point on their own. It can never be a collective belief. Also, the mythical road-marks of the Bible are so encrusted with age-old dogma and other regressive obsessions that they can hardly be seen in Frye’s way without a great deal of quizzical reservation. For the terms of the old interpretations are not easily pulled from their moorings. Frye’s real contribution lies not in any strengthening of the religious tradition, since he is highly sceptical and even “revolutionary” as a thinker, but in his opening up of new areas of exploration for humane speculation and curiosity.

7. Einbinder, Susan. “Alter vs. Frye: Which Bible?” *Prooftexts* 4 (Sept. 1984): 301-8.

Talmudic legend holds that before his death Moses was favored with a visit to the classroom of Rabbi Akiba, the man purportedly most responsible for the transmission of his teachings to the future generations. The great scholar and martyr of the first century is credited by tradition with the development of the major hermeneutic techniques for rabbinic interpretation of the Bible. So little did the Akiban school’s rendering of the Law resemble Moses’, that it is little wonder that the mighty prophet could not understand a word of the lesson. Perhaps ironically, he was assured when, after a disciple challenged Akiba and demanded the source of his interpretation, the master calmly responded, “this is the teaching according to Moses from Sinai”. (The story appears in *Sefer ha’aggadah* of Bialik and Ravnitzky [Tel Aviv, 1974], p. 178, where its source is cited as Menahot 29b.)

In the face of the formidable hermeneutic of modern-day criticism, one wonders how reassured he would be by the same response today. The Bible as an entity has implacably resisted the pokes and prods of theology, philology, mysticism and history. Most recently the literary critic has turned his hand to the task. The ensuing deluge of literary studies, theories, analyses, models, elucidations and explications of the Bible demands that we go beyond the mere question of whether the Bible is literature at all. What defines the bounds of literature, and what it is supposed to do, have always been a consequence of culturally variable and mutable perceptions and institutions. Perhaps more to the point here, is to question whether the current flurry of interest in literary studies of the Bible is symptomatic of a development, even crisis, in the academic and professional realm of literary studies. It would then be appropriate to question also the significance of such a development in the larger context of cultural systems, and crises, of which the academic community (despite its frequent protestations of immunity) is a highly specialized part.

Whether the Bible is literature or not, or even a book, with the formal properties of closure and unity which that implies in Western letters, it is being subjected to literary scrutiny and understanding. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, by Northrop Frye, and *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, by Robert Alter, bring very different methods of literary analysis to the Bible. If genuine literary criticism, as Frye has suggested in a much earlier work, the *Anatomy of Criticism*, “progresses toward making the whole of literature intelligible” [9], then he applies that principle in attempting a generalized study of the linguistic, mythic, metaphoric and topological structures of the Christian Bible. That generalized study sees in the Bible, ultimately, the key to the mythological and poetic structures it bequeathed to the Western world, and which they syncretized to their Hellenistic counterparts. Alter’s work, in contrast, is concerned with the close reading of narratives from the Hebrew Bible. He attempts to show the invention and development of special narrative techniques as a special consequence of the evolution of monotheistic thought.

Both authors, to begin with, recognize the seriousness of the question of translation in any literary treatment of the Bible. (I refer the reader to Edward Greenstein’s excellent article, “Theories of Modern Bible Translation” in *Prooftexts* 3:1 [1983]: 9–39.) Yet their solutions are radically distinct. Alter, who treats only the Hebrew Bible, provides his own translations. Unsurprisingly, the translation often reflects his interpretation of the text at hand, a problem with all translations, but one of which the non-Hebrew reader should here be forwarded. Frye insists upon the King James Version (AV), which choice he justifies as follows: “I use [the AV] version because as [the authors] explain . . . they were not trying to make a new translation but a traditional one. In other words, the AV is a translation centrally in the Vulgate tradition, and so comes very close to the Bible familiar to writers in Europe from the fifth century on” [xiii]. Significantly, then the “Bible” for Frye appears in the manifestation in which it serves as a crucial structure in the generative matrix of Western mythology and thought—in the words of William Blake, a favorite of Frye’s, the “Great Code.” And indeed, it is the Bible as the cipher of Western culture which lies at the heart of Frye’s work. The Bible is a “gigantic myth,” a narrative spanning creation to apocalypse. Its synchronic companion is a “metaphor cluster” generated by its imagery motifs. The overall pattern of the Bible is one of the descent and return, the New Testament (N.T.) mirroring and paralleling the Old and directing it describes as existing in the Christian Bible itself” [xxii]. Each unit of the first half of the book sets up the theoretical model for a more specific development in its mirror unit in the book’s second half. (Frye promises us that the whole book is merely presage to a second volume.) The first chapter (Language I) begins with a discussion of language, Vico, and the evolution of certain concerns in Western thought about literature. Vico’s premise of the primacy (chronological and qualitative) of poetic over prosaic forms is central to Frye. Frye takes up Vico’s three stage movement from mythical to heroic to vulgar forms of expression, renames them hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic, and associates them with poetic, allegorical and descriptive forms of writing.

History moves progressively to the descriptive mode, but retains elements of the more “primitive” modes as well. Hence the tense concerns of Western language—between reality and illusion, myth and history, subject and object. The Bible does not clearly fall into any one of the three literary modes, but into a fourth category, which Frye calls “kerygma,” the form of proclamation and “oratorical rhetoric” [29]. Myth as the proper vehicle of kerygma, is the subject of chapter 2 (Myth I).

Frye defines myth in its radical sense of “plot” or narrative, and secondarily as “the language with which a society is told what is important for it to know” [33]. The first function attaches myth to literature, the second to its social utilization as “concerned knowledge” [47]. Stressing the “literal” truth of the text, Frye obviates any need to distinguish between biblical *myth* and *history*: “The general principle involved here is that if anything historically true is in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true but for different reasons” [40]. The Bible is a *Heilgeschichte* vision, presenting us with a history of God’s actions in the world, and the relationship of human beings to them. Metaphor I, the third chapter, describes the imaginative and metahistorical elements of his this vision. Frye now introduces the synchronic axis of his critical plan. Read sequentially, the Bible is a narrative, or myth. Seen as a totality, it “freezes” into a unified structure, or metaphor. Most mythologies, Frye argues, “freeze” into cosmologies. True to its eccentric form, the Bible resists “freezing” into static metaphor. Just as its narrative character resisted Vico’s three-tiered categorization, compelling the creation of a fourth tier (the kerygmatic), its metaphor cluster “freezes,” not into the anticipated cosmology, but to a “vision of upward metamorphosis” [76]. The social myth of the people Israel is reflected and extended in the personal life of Jesus; the combined Old and New Testaments are thus a metaphor for the figure of Christ. The next chapter (Typology I) introduces the double-mirror structure of the Christian Bible, and the concept of topological thought. Typology, in which things are seen as the fulfillment of antitypes preceding them, is essentially future-related. (Causality, on contrast, finds fulfillment in the past.) Frye develops the type of the “royal metaphor.” Most mythologies, Frye argues, “freeze” into cosmologies. True to its eccentric form, the Bible resists “freezing” into static metaphor. Just as its narrative character resisted Vico’s three-tiered categorization, compelling the creation of a fourth tier (the kerygmatic), its metaphor cluster “freezes,” not into the anticipated cosmology, but to a “vision of upward metamorphosis” [76]. The social myth of the people Israel is reflected and extended in the personal life of Jesus: the combined Old and New Testaments are thus a metaphor for the figure of Christ.

The next chapter (Typology I) introduces the double-mirror structure of the Christian Bible, and the concept of topological thought. Typology, in which things are seen as the fulfillment of antitypes preceding them, is essentially future-related. (Causality, in contrast, finds fulfillment in the past.) Frye develops the type of the “royal metaphor.” Here, for example, the king may stand by extension for the whole people; by analogy, the Messiah (N.T.) is a royal metaphor for the society Israel of the O.T. Implicit in the royal metaphor is a tension between the individual and his subordination to the social metaphor (even in democratic societies, Frye notes, the “notion of a socially detached individual is an illusion” [100–1]). The royal metaphor becomes an effective, if totalitarian, identification of individual and state.

At this juncture, the book pivots, and starts on its upward return. In chapter 5 (Typology II), Frye lays out the seven phases through which the (Christian) Bible dialectically progresses. In Creation, the focus is on integration and then the fall irrevocably alienating man from nature. Revolution emphasizes the anti-cyclical progress of history and a theological attitude (a “culbute générale” [115]) affirming the triumph of the righteous. This is followed naturally by Law, and then Wisdom which Frye sees as the individualized commentary on the general phase of Law. An “anxiety of continuity” [121] echoes in the Wisdom literature, with its concomitant concerns for the preservation of authority, and prudence in future action. Prophecy, the next phase, is the

individualizing commentary on Revolution, and stresses cultic or secular (monarchic) validation of the revolutionary impulse. Gospel is an intensification of the prophetic vision. Frye returns here to the tension between individual and state, society's inability to absorb the individual and the type of scapegoat. The final phase, Apocalypse, sets forth a new series of antitypes for a messianic "re-Creation."

Chapter 6 (Metaphor II) describes the imagery patterns of the Bible. There are two levels of nature, the lower nature dominated by human life and the higher nature of Eden/Redemption, each possessing a parodical, or demonic, counterpart. Frye elaborates upon five bodies of biblical imagery: the paradisaical, the pastoral, the agricultural, the urban and the imagery of human life. He notes the "shrinkage" [158–9] of sacred space from Creation, through the Old into the New Testament (until, in Revelations, it is no longer necessary, cf. Rev. 21:22). The following chapter (Myth II) exposes the "U"-shaped narrative which Frye claims characterizes the Christian Bible. A series of descents and ascents, with their parodical antitheses, is elaborated, all of which themselves become adumbrations on the descent-and-ascent of the Exodus from Egypt. (The descent into the Sea, and the ascent into freedom on the other shore are paralleled in the N.T. by Jesus' death, descent to Hell and Resurrection.) The final chapter (Language II) discusses a theory of the "polysemous meaning" [220] of myth. This brings Frye back to his introductory chapter, and Dante's four-fold categories for interpreting language—the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical—evoking *The Great Code's* own antitype, the *Anatomy of Criticism*.

Frye's argument for the Christian Bible as an internally coherent and generative totality informs his analysis. Alter also sees the (Hebrew) Bible as a commanding totality. But, for Alter, this is less the dominant issue than an underlying presupposition to his detailed *explications de texte*. The inner workings of Old Testament narrative expose the evolution (Alter would say, revolution) of monotheistic culture. *The Art of Biblical Narrative* opens lamenting the "Infancy" of literary analysis of the Bible (for Alter, the "Bible" is always the Hebrew Bible) and the more or less salutary influences of various schools of modern literary criticism on an understanding of biblical text. Two techniques characterize biblical narrative: (1) narrative analogy (one narrative providing commentary on another) and (2) a "richly expressive syntax" [21]. Dismissing objections to a literary analysis of "sacred history," Alter argues that the unique character of biblical narrative is connected radically with the practice of monotheism. The Bible as "prose narrative" is, first, an avoidance of the (polytheistic) epic form, and, second, a unique instance of a sacred history composed in prose [25]. Alter concludes that a tension reverberates in the biblical narrative, between divine order and human disorder, divine providence and human freedom.

Like Frye, Alter recognizes the importance of "type-scenes" in the biblical story. He argues for reading them as variations on an implicit convention, rather than as "duplications" of a single *ur-story* [50]. As in the Homeric literature, certain conventional scenes, motifs and situations are expected in the narrative. Alter illustrates the type-scene of the betrothal, with its variations, in the stories of Rebekah and Abraham's servant, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, Ruth and Boaz, the aborted betrothal scene with Saul (1 Sam. 9:11–11), David and his wives, and Samson. He then turns to a discussion on the uses of dialogue and third-person narrative. The Bible's preference, he claims, is for the former, and direct dialogue becomes a medium for subtle characterization. Where narration appears in place of dialogue, it is always important to ask why it does so. Is it conveying actions essential to the plot, providing data ancillary to the plot, or "mirroring, confirming, subverting or focussing" dialogue statements [77]? A chapter is devoted to devices of repetition in biblical narrative, a scale of techniques including the *leitwort* (a "leading word" which recurs in various permutations and significations), and motif image, the theme, sequences of actions (e.g., the folkloric three trials), the type-scene. The story of Balaam (Num. 22–24) and Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39) serve as illustrations, resounding Alter's theme of "human freedom" in tension with "divine

historical plan” [113]. He uses the story of David, Michal and Saul to further demonstrate biblical techniques of characterization. Again, the biblical sense of character as evolving and even erratic, as well as the techniques for character representation, relate to its theological outlook: “since art does not develop in a vacuum, these literary techniques must be associated with the conception of human nature implicit in biblical monotheism . . .” [115].

The Bible is a work of “composite artistry,” and Alter next tackles contemporary attitudes towards coherence, unity and authorship. The appropriate boundaries for any of these concepts differ markedly for the biblical writer and the reader today. Two narratives—Joseph remeeting his brothers in Egypt (Gen. 42) and the Creation story (Gen. 2)—provide the textual proof. The final chapter resounds his theme; the biblical tale is a “narrative experiment in the possibilities of moral, spiritual and historical knowledge” [157] in the wake of a “monotheistic revolution” [176]. The concluding pages offer keys to the reader of biblical narrative, emphasizing attentiveness to words, actions, dialogue and narration.

Both Alter and Frye make compelling statements about the virtuostic achievement of the biblical writers. Alter’s book contains some very sensitive readings of biblical narrative. His objective is limited to narrative, and he stays carefully within its bounds. Still, his interpretations are sometimes flawed by a tendency to ascribe modern psychology and emotions to biblical personages. Thus, Tamar is sentimentally described as a “childless young widow” [7] when the text stresses not her pitiability but her legal claim to Judah’s son (incidentally, there is no indication that she is young. Similarly, Alter invokes “the naked unreflective brutality of Judah’s response” to her [9], which reads a bit too much of modern male consciousness into a preliberation character. His analyses occasionally take on a near midrashic life of their own. This means his conclusions are not always warranted by the data. In this regard, his control over the reader, through his translation and presentation of segmented narratives, is crucial. For instance, in making a perfectly valid observation about the subtle possibilities for characterization in the juxtaposition of terse v. long-winded discourse, he offers the exchange between David and Saul in 1. Sam. 24: “To David’s impassioned, elaborate rhetoric of self-justification, Saul responds with a kind of choked cry, ‘Is it your voice, David, my son?’ Perhaps he asks this out of sheer amazement . . . or because he is too far off . . . or because his eyes are blinded with tears” [37]. The analysis hangs on the brevity of Saul’s reply. But a look at the text will quickly reveal that Saul catches his wind in a short order, and responds with some pretty heavy-handed rhetoric himself (1 Sam. 24:17–21—and it is valuable to compare the doublet to this story in 1 Sam. 26, where in fact Saul’s replies *are* relatively truncated, cf. 1 Sam. 26:17, 21). Alter is consistently better when he sticks to the texts than when he strains to harmonize them to his theories about the relation of prose narrative to monotheism, and the motif of freedom and chaos against divine plan. The point that literary forms, and literary tensions, evolve in relation to a cultural context is well-made. In the case of the Bible, it is also risky. We do not know whether the Bible was a central document, a representative document or a unique document in its original context. The phenomenon of prose narrative is not, as Alter claims, unique to the Hebrew Bible—see, for instance, the Idrimi narrative from Alalakh (in northern Syria).

Nor are cultural anachronisms absent in Frye’s work. Thus, prophecy provided a “comfortable living” by the “not very difficult effort” involved in its practice [126]. God prefers Abel’s “massacre of animals” to his brother’s vegetarian offering [150]. (On several occasions, Frye misreads the attributes of various animals. The “Biblical preference for sheep” over bulls may have simply been a matter of economy; the symbol of automobile culture is not a Rolls Royce but something on a lesser scale.) That female animals are generally ignored in the biblical literature [185] is a significant comment even beyond economics (male animals are more expendable), which Frye does not develop: was there, in fact, a mythological or psychological motivation behind a cultic preference for male or female offerings?

Scholars of the Hebrew Bible, in addition to their unhappiness over the use of the AV, may feel Frye has left them holding half a book. They will also feel uneasy with the image of the O.T. (with its books in Christian sequence) as a projection towards messianic fulfillment in the New. Frye very definitely treats an English-language, Christian Bible (thus, for instance, he can speak of “dragon imagery” in the Bible) which he sees as metaphorically equivalent to the person of the Christ. Nonetheless, his analyses of biblical imagery, methods and structures illuminate both the Hebrew and Christian works. Someone should repeat Frye’s work with the Hebrew canon. Frye treats the biblical cult cursorily, although he makes some tantalizing remarks about sacred space. That short shrift to the cult is noteworthy in a work so staggeringly encyclopedic. Frye makes several observations on the “shrinkage” of sacred space as one progresses through the Bible. And when he presents his double-mirror of the New and Old Testaments, he correctly sees the Pentateuch as the antitype, and reflection, of the Gospels. But there are five books, in the Pentateuch, and four in the Gospels—a conspicuous erasure of the typological fulfillment of Leviticus, the Pentateuch’s central book. Leviticus, in fact, is the Pentateuch’s central book because it mimetically repeats, in literary form, the architectural centrality of the Tabernacle and cult. The sacred space of the cult was protected by buffering concentric zones of decreasing sanctity; Leviticus, the literary analogue of that space, is buffered by Genesis and Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This suggests a perception of structure neither U-shaped nor linearly directed from origin to goal, but center-oriented. One of the organizing principles of the biblical writers may not have been a start-to-finish one, with a structure defined by its beginning and end. Parts of the Bible may, indeed, reflect a perception of structure held together by a magnetic center, which challenges the fundamental premise of Frye’s comprehensive analysis.

The insistence of both Frye and Alter on situating the Bible, Jewish or Christian, in a central position of specifically literary and generally cultural importance, in itself runs counter to several prevailing literary-critical schools of discourse. These schools—deconstructionalism primarily, but also those of Hegelian/Marxist influence, Lacan, Foucault, Kristeva (which, though less influential in the U.S., have strong adherents in Europe)—have bought to the fore, in recent years a growing arsenal of *decentering* terminology, their point being, with individual variations, to detach the text from its sanctified centrality and to approach it from positions of interdisciplinary networks of thought and peripheral perspectives. The analogy to the N.T. annihilation of sacred space is relevant: the new critics come to displace and supplant the old notions of textual centrality, sanctity, and imperviousness to other cultural disciplines.

In this context, the efforts of Frye and Alter, as well as the myriad other forays into biblical literature (in academic enclaves and in the seminaries) are suggestive. When Harry Orlinsky commented, regarding the “new” (1962) JPS translation of the Pentateuch, that we had entered upon a new renaissance of biblical translation, he was perhaps arguing the advent in literary studies such as these. For, Orlinsky says, “Ever since World War I in the teens, the world depression of the early thirties, the rise of fascism in Europe, the horrors of World War II, the cold and hot and lukewarm wars of the past decade and a half, increasing unemployment and automation, and the rather frequent recessions, it has become ever more clear that reason alone was unable to bring our problems closer to solution. And so, people have begun to come back to Holy Scripture, to the Bible” (“The New Jewish Version of the Torah: Towards a New Philosophy of Bible Translation,” *Essays in Biblical Culture and Bible Translation* [New York, 1974], p. 397).

To the extent to which the academic community is a seismic register of society at large, the current interest in the Bible “as literature” is perhaps attuned to an endemic anxiety in Western culture. And certainly Western society is undergoing a moment of serious soul-searching and disorientation. It is a soul-searching and a disorientation whose tremors are of a magnitude which must be felt in the most privileged of its subunits, the academic community among them. And one

may, perhaps, be permitted to tender the correlative to such a statement—that same privileged community is obligated to transmit its rarefied perceptions to the general community—that, in the end, this is a crucial ingredient in academic, and societal, redemption.

At a recent symposium of literary critics gathered to discuss the relationship of politics to literary interpretation, Edward Said lamented the self-serving ethereality which has come to characterize the academic community, a state of affairs in which “critics read each other and (care) about little else.” Interpretation, he comments, “is the work of intellectuals, a class badly in need today of moral rehabilitation and social redefinition.” Both Frye and Alter speak eloquently of humanistic ends. Alter’s concern with the struggle to reach order from a disordered world is after all more a concern of the present age than of the Patriarchs’. Frye, too, speaks movingly of the message of Job, the human striving for “a consciousness that is neither proud nor abased, but simply responsible, and accepts what responsibility is there . . .” [195]. If these books serve in any way to clarify human history, and the human enterprise, they belong not only to scholars. “The Book” never has. And if it is an unfortunate necessity that is to scholars they are chiefly accessible, then scholarship must resume its struggle in relating to the world, and rehumanizing the world—a world, in fact, which even scholars have never left.

8. Fennell, William O. “Theology and Frye: Some Implications of *The Great Code*.” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1 (Spring 1985): 113–21.

The interest of Christian scholars in Northrop Frye’s bestseller on the Bible is easily understood. To subject it to critical appraisal from their perspective may seem another matter. It wasn’t written with them predominantly in mind. It is a work of literary criticism, written by a renowned literary critic, who from the commencement of his brilliant career has had a deep and lasting interest in the formative role the Bible has played in the creation of the literature of western culture. A colleague has written. “Frye’s general theory calls for the literature of a civilization to be the working out and maintenance of its mythology, the interrelated set of metaphors and narratives that articulates the imaginative world within which civilization lives. It has been a key contention of his that the Bible represents the mythology that performs this function for Western civilization and makes Western literature intelligible” (Francis Sparshott, in a review published in *Philosophy and Literature* 6 [October 1982]. I use this helpful quotation with some hesitation because I judge some aspects of the review to be unfair).

It is clear from the quotation why Frye should sub-title the book “The Bible and Literature” rather than “The Bible as Literature” and why the dominant perspective from which it is written is not that of faith and the Church but of general culture and humane letters.

Surely no Christian believer should object in principle to such an approach to the study of the Bible and its meaning for humankind. But it is deeply interesting for the theologian to note what happens to the Bible and its message when culture and its interests are made predominant rather than the faith out of which the Bible has come and to which it is addressed. It could be that we find here only different understandings that flow from different interests and methodologies such as occurs when sociologists or cultural historians, for instance, adopt methods of enquiry into the nature of the Church which in principle exclude the insights of faith but without contesting their validity. There is what Frye speaks of as polysemy, diverse, multidimensional kinds of understanding which clash only when one confuses one kind or level for another. Nevertheless, as Frye makes clear, no fundamental contradiction in thought and understanding is legitimate. Polysemous meaning must preserve an organic integrity for all its diverse kinds of understanding. Reason must preserve wholeness in all attempts to understand and know.

The question this essay seeks to explore is whether Frye's literary understanding of the Bible represents simply a diverse kind to theological understanding or whether fundamental contradictions appear at crucial points that he states or implies. Written in a spirit of interdepartmental dialogue, our effort will show at least where difficulties in understanding reside.

With regard to the way in which Frye's general understanding of language dominates the particular understanding of the Bible's structure and meaning, one wonders if sufficient room is left for the theological understanding of the way the community's faith determined both form and content in the tradition out of which the Bible came. Frye discusses the myths of the Bible, and indeed the Bible itself as one gigantic myth, in terms of a general understanding of the way in which both myths of many gods, and the myth of a monotheistic God, function in culture generally. But Brevard Childs, in his work *Myth and Reality in The Old Testament*, has sought to show how faith convictions modified the myths that were borrowed from the surrounding culture in order to make them adequate to express the community's faith (*Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*. [London: S.C.M., 1960], p. 112).

This controlling feature of faith would mean that there was, to use Frye's term, some kind of metonymic control over the metaphoric language chosen to convey the message about what was believed. On principle, Frye would have to regard this dominance as a weakening of the metaphor's power to express its vision of reality. But is this necessarily the case? A "broken myth" that is a myth reflected upon by reason, does not necessarily reduce the myth to a simple illustration of a philosophic or theological argument. For a dialectical relation may be sustained between a myth's visionary insight and linguistic power to convey meaning on the one hand, and faith's understanding of reality on the other, each giving to and receiving from the other in dynamic ways. Is not T.S. Eliot's poetry a case in point? Is it not so that with him, as with the sources from which the Bible came, it is faith's understanding that dominates the language that is sought and found to express it in powerful ways? Frye makes much of the "kerygmatic" style of the Bible, "rhetoric" marking it throughout. But one wonders whether the testimonial, witnessing character of the Bible is sufficiently taken into account by Frye. When one passes from the question of form to the question of meaning and asks what the rhetoric is about, does not metonymic understanding inevitably dominate the language of myth and metaphor and the narrative forms of expression even while being empowered by them in communicating its message?

In a symposium held at the University of Guelph recently, under the title "The Bible in the University," Paul Ricoeur was asked for a paper on "The Bible and the Imagination" (see Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Bible as a Document of the University*. Gerhard Ebeling, James Barr, and Paul Ricoeur [Chicago: Scholars Press, 1981], p. ii, 178). In it he engages in his usual profound and insightful way in an interpretation of two biblical parables, the Sower and the Unjust Tenants, seeing them in their hermeneutical interrelation one with the other. But then he shows that the parables yield this interrelated understanding only when set within the context of the larger parable or story of the Story-Teller himself. It was faith's understanding of the significance of the death of Jesus for the spread of the Gospel that fed into the biblical stories and Ricoeur's imaginative interpretation of them.

Frye is sharply critical of a traditional view that Scripture finds fulfilment in the doctrines of the Church, the Bible thought to be the type for which they are the antitype. Doctrine for Frye seems always to suggest something rigid, fixed, stilted, lacking in flow! Myth and metaphors alone are alive. Without denying that theology often has become, and continues in some quarters still to become, rigid and arid in these ways, surely there is another possibility—that theology like the faith it seeks to understand, may be kept fresh and alive through the closest relation with the Bible's poetic, metaphorical forms of expression which Frye brilliantly and helpfully describes. Surely in doing theology, as in preaching, the vitality of the Word of God that flows through Scripture *may* be

sustained; something of the inexhaustible Word *may* keep the constantly renewed content of theology fluid and alive. And again we ask, must not such a theology be called on inevitably (as in Eliot, Childs, Ricoeur) to serve as guide to faith-understanding of Scripture, as a whole or in part?

We cited above the title of Child's book, *Myth and Reality the Old Testament*. In it "reality" connotes something outside literature that literature serves. It is difficult for this reader at least to determine exactly what "reality" is for Frye, or how it relates to words. He states that the most primitive and therefore fundamental way to reality is by way of myth and metaphor [226]. But for Frye these forms of language do not seem to be, as they are for Childs, kinds of language used to express reality other than they. They are themselves the reality expressed! Reality, it would seem, is ideality, or better, spirituality—vision incarnated in the words and express it. Fundamentally, reality is not something looked at, but something one looks with; not something objectively true or false but vision of ideal possibility that sets the self and society the task of actualizing it in the world. In this regard a critical point for theology arises at the places where Frye resists the idea that the Bible has any point of reference beyond itself. What may have been originally "facts," say in the history of Israel or the life of Jesus, have in the Bible been taken up and expanded into myths—without "remainder" so to speak. Frye says: "If anything historically true is in the Bible it is there not because it is historically true but for different reasons. The reasons have presumably something to do with spiritual profundity or significance. And historical truth has no correlation with spiritual profundity, unless the relation is inverse" [223]. A number of critical comments suggest themselves in these regards. First, there is throughout the book, as we have noted, an idealizing of reality that one associates with an earlier theological period that was under the influence of Hegel. Frye acknowledges that influence. But we have witnessed in our day a powerful theological critique of such spiritualizing understandings of the Christian faith, which believes to find in the Bible itself a more realistic understanding of the reality of God and his kingdom and thus of the historical destiny of humankind.

Secondly, we may well agree with Frye's insistence that the only Jesus we can or need to know is the Jesus of the Bible *story*, and that the Bible in no way offers any kind of scientific description of his person and life. But surely it is not therefore necessary to hold that the full reality of Jesus is contained in the biblical story of him. Some of the difficulty here may lie in Frye's seemingly simplistic understanding of what history means. History for him seems only to mean "chronicle." No room appears for the possibility that history may mean interpreted happening and that myth or metaphor may be the kinds of language used for that interpretation. In Frye the factuality of that of which the Bible speaks disappears; the occurrence, the happening, becomes entirely swallowed up in the interpretation of it, with no aspect of externality remaining. The "historical event" is transformed into a "language event" and the reality becomes a tale that is told. Again the question arises: What does reality mean; wherein does it reside? Surely the objectivity of Jesus Christ cannot simply be swallowed up in the story in this way. It is true that for an understanding of who Jesus was, and is, we must indeed look, and remain looking, at the biblical story of him. But his reality is not exhaustively the Bible's story of him but a real otherness of being that the story itself implies. (See the interesting argument of Hans W. Frei in *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975], xviii, p. 173.) As Frye insists, there is in the Bible no scientific description of an "historical" Jesus. There is only the Jesus seen through the eye of faith and told about in story form. But the story points, we believe, to reality other than itself, as indeed, one way or another, all stories do.

It is for some such objective referring from Bible to reality "beyond" it, that Frye becomes critical of Dante's understanding, while commending him most highly for his biblical understanding in other regards. Concerning Dante's understanding of the "pointing character" of the Bible to Jesus' person and work as reality beyond the Bible itself Frye writes: "Once more the more real . . .

turns out to be something external to words, and regarded as superior to them” [223]. To that comment we feel constrained to answer “yes” and “no.” The reality “beyond” the Bible may indeed be no more real than the story itself, or “superior” to it so much are these one with the reality itself. Nevertheless, biblical words, no matter how potent and alive, do not exhaust God’s or Christ’s reality for faith. The Bible must always be thought to have a “pointing” character, witnessing to Being beyond itself.

This understanding Frye seems to deny. “The Bible,” he asserts, “deliberately blocks off the sense of the referential from itself: it is not a book pointing to a historical presence outside it, but a book that identifies itself with that presence” [137]. Again we perforce must answer “yes” and “no.” The latter part of the statement is certainly true. But the former part is not necessarily its implicate. Surely the reality and presence of God cannot be entirely thought of as “linguistic event.” The Book of Revelation, says Frye, “describes [sic!] God as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of all possibilities of verbal expression” [137]. Is there here an unconscious slip on Frye’s part, away from a fully metaphoric way of thinking to a “demotic” way of thinking about God, first in the use of the word “describe” and second, in interpreting the Greek alphabetic metaphor solely in a verbal sense? Frye does the same with the metaphor “Word of God.” But understanding “Word” literally in this way, as signifying only language, seems to move in a direction away from metaphorical to a descriptive understanding.

However, to return to the main point, we could not object to identifying God with the biblical witness to him if what was asserted is no more (nor less) than that there is no other God to be known, and no other way of encountering him, than through the verbal witness of Scripture. We would still experience some difficulty with assertions that identify the reality of God as “Word” with the literal words of Scripture. A literalist idolatry seems to threaten here. Frye makes a move against the threat by identifying himself with a saying of Milton: “Milton suggests that the ultimate authority in the Christian religion is what he calls the Word of God in the heart, which is superior even to the Bible itself, because for Milton this “heart” belongs not to the subjective reader but to the Holy Spirit. That is, the reader completes the visionary operation of the Bible by throwing out the subjective fallacy along with the objective one. The apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared” [138].

We may return later to the question of the disappearance of the ego, but at the moment our concern is with the disappearance of the objective reality of God. We repeat, God may indeed not be known other than through the biblical testimony to him. But the God thus known is surely Other than the testimony to him—even “more” if you will. It is not the Bible that is the living Word of life, though Who he truly is, and what his deed, cannot be learned otherwise than here.

It is difficult for the writer to imagine a reading of the Bible that could dispense with the metaphor of God as a reality before Whom, or even, as with Bonhoeffer, “without Whom,” one lives out his days. But in his discussion of the implications of the biblical witness to atonement Frye suggests that “the whole metaphorical picture of the relation of man and God has to be reversed” [134]. “Man does not stand helpless before an invisible but objective power, making conciliatory gesture of ritual or moral obligation to him” [134]. It is rather God behind, “a power that can do anything through man,” that is implicit in Jesus’ strong emphasis on God as “Father” [134]. Such a way of imagining the relationship between humankind and God offers to Frye a glimpse of “the possibility of getting past the pseudo-issues growing out of the metaphor of a divine presence in front of us, who may be believed or disbelieved ‘in’ because he may or may not be ‘there.’” The discussion then continues in a somewhat baffling way, given the foregoing: “Theist and atheist are one in regarding personality as the highest category known to experience. Whether it is possible for human personality to be connected with and open to a divine one that is its own infinite extension may still be in question” [134].

If “personality” is so fundamental to our thinking about ourselves and God, why change the metaphor of man before God? Why not rather give to the metaphor “Word of God” an even fuller metaphorical sense than Frye’s linguistic understanding of it? Preserving the truth that “personality is the highest category known to human experience,” “Word of God” would then signify a personal God engaged in loving self-communication, first within his own divine self-being, the Word being with God, and being God from the beginning (John 1:1); then that same loving-will-to-communicate-with-the-other, creating a world containing (eventually) human personal beings capable of receiving and responding to the personal address of their Creator.

In thinking of the Bible as such a “Word of God,” we may indeed have thought too naively, simplistically and exclusively in terms of the prophetic mode of God’s self-communication to his human creatures, as Frye claims most have, thus ignoring the “scissors and paste” manner in which the narrative of God’s self-giving Word has been shaped by the tradition. But not to see the Word—and hear it—as an address of God who is Other, communicating his being and will to his people from beyond themselves, seems to be telling a story about God that is other than the one the Bible tells. Of course, in the case both of Frye’s interpretation and our own, we have indeed broken into the metaphor with the reason, using metonymy in quest of metaphor’s meaning, a use of reason that would seem unavoidable to both literary critic and theologian.

We touch here on the question of “revelation.” Unlike the word “inspiration” for which Frye finds little use, there is, he thinks, need for the term “revelation” for want of a better word. What revelation means for him it is again not easy to say. We find difficulty in the interpretations he offers for the Bible’s seven phases of revelation, as he counts them: Creation, Exodus (or “revolution”), Law, Wisdom, Prophecy, Gospel, Apocalypse. Anything of the nature of “mystery” seems to have disappeared from the humanizing, secularizing interpretation Frye gives to these terms. Interestingly enough, having regard to what Frye has written about the non-referential character of the Bible, toward the end of the book he writes: “This ‘literal’ Bible of myth and metaphor then combines with its opposite, or secular knowledge, the world of history and concept which lies outside the Bible, *but to which the Bible continually points*. It points to it because it grows out of that world, not because it regards it as establishing the criteria for itself” [228; italics added].

As for the literal Bible of myth and metaphor, “revelation” might represent, one supposes, the secret source of spiritual energy that becomes transformed into vision and articulated in words. “Emerging revelation” is blocked, Frye thinks, not by what was anciently spoken of as a “forgetting” but by what moderns peak of as “repression.” Perhaps the reader can appreciate how a biblical theologian would find considerable difficulty in regarding much of this account as adequate!

At the beginning of this book Frye speaks about the significance of the fact that its sub-title is not “the Bible as Literature” but rather “the Bible and Literature.” The distinction is important, firstly because it marks the intent of the work which, including the intended second volume, is to discuss the impact of the Bible on the literature of Western culture. However the distinction also represents the fact that for Frye the Bible is more than literature as such. That “more” has to do with “faith.” Faith for Frye, as he makes even clearer in his book *The Critical Path*, expresses humanity’s need for myths of concern to meet the existential problems of life. The Bible in addition to being a work of literature is a gigantic myth of concern. It addresses also that other social need which is for a myth of freedom transcending concern—a myth creative of a free community of love that myths of concern as such cannot meet. Faith, Frye asserts, is always a limiting thing. It creates closed communities. “Professed belief in itself is instinctively aggressive” [229]. Even at best “there comes a point at which a structure of faith seems to become part of the Tower of Babel, one of a number of competing and mutually unintelligible assertions with a vague factual basis” [230]. What humanity needs most is “a language that escapes from argument and refutation,” a language of love. This too the Bible offers to those who have eyes to see. But it may be that only the students of the

“works of human imagination” can make any real contact with this vision of the Bible. “Such vision is, among other things, the quality in all serious religions that enables them to be associated with products of culture and imagination, where the limit is the conceivable and not the actual” [231]. The following list of questions may serve as a summary of mentioned or further critical points:

1. Need differing communities of faith be as lovelessly separatist as Frye thinks they inevitably must be? Have not the ecumenical endeavours of our time, meagre and ambiguous though they be, demonstrated beyond possibility the actuality of communities at once of faith and love?
2. Does not the basis for this realized possibility reside in the reality of Jesus Christ, who is at once object of faith and source of love, a grace-giving-presence, mediated by, though transcending, a linguistic event of believing proclamation and hearing?
3. In Jesus’ relation to God, and ours through him, we have not learned that the relation of Creator to creature is not necessarily, indeed never truly, a master-slave relationship, as Frye thinks all traditional doctrines of creation still imply, but a relationship of heavenly Father to human children who, to be truly joyfully fulfilled, need not aspire to transcend their creaturehood?
4. It is not God, the Wholly Other, who through Christ has given us the liberty that both Milton and Frye celebrate as the Gospel’s chief gift; and does that liberty not enfold our secular life and everything in it that is good? And is it not only when God, the Other-as-Giver, is fully recognized as such that human beings in their creativity are protected against the idolatry of confusing themselves with God?

Toward the end of his book, Frye raises the fundamental existential question: “What speaks to us across death?” Today, in this apocalyptic time, when our existential concern is perforce not only about our individual death but the possible destruction of all living things, what or who indeed can speak to us across that horror and end? Is it not only One who is Reality outside though known only through the verbal world of the Bible? Surely it is only if the Bible’s vision of God reflects not only “possibility” but also “actuality” that “hope” also may be added to the Christian virtues of faith and love. Across the threat of global death the biblical kerygma of God still sounds its word “Behold I make all things new.” And that kerygma is grounded in the already accomplished triumph over death in Jesus Christ.

9. Fixler, Michael. “Myth and History.” *Commentary* 74 (August 1982): 76–80.

Serious reading of the Bible is not an occasional pastime but a steady absorption, involving reading and rereading, deriving from the sustained experience a web of comprehensive meaning. There are few serious readers of the Bible today who are not either fundamentalists, mainline clergy—ministers, rabbis, and priests—or professional scholars and critics. The serious secular Bible reader, like the Common Reader of a generation ago, may well be a mythical creature. But if he doesn’t exist he has to be created, which is presumably why “Bible as Literature” courses flourish in colleges and universities. And he has to be created, preferably mass-produced, to leaven the cultural lump. Otherwise we have for the literary advocate of the Bible a distressing situation, a culture based upon a tradition, the once vital source of which is really not accessible, much less familiar to the general market of word consumers. This is not to say the Bible isn’t available, often freely distributed as an inducement to read it. Whether and how it is read are other matters.

Hence the problem Northrop Frye deals with in *The Great Code*: how to describe this book to secular readers when neither those who prescribe Bible reading nor those for whom it is prescribed are at all sure of its status. What is it? What it purports to be we know as a matter of history: in its respective forms, the charters of traditional Judaism and Christianity. Some at least of those who

continue to take the Bible in these terms should take comfort from Frye's work. But he is not writing for them. He is after the secular teacher of literature, and readers whose approach to the Bible will be, even if only initially, mediated by such teachers.

Frye himself is a very serious, lucidly articulate, and witty reader of the Bible. That he happens to be an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ often seems a distracting irrelevance, given his stature as the most powerfully original and honored literary critic in the English-speaking world. Yet much in his work points to whatever moved him to become a minister—a vocation he has apparently never practiced. He confesses that the whole of his great synoptic account of language and literature, focused first in the *Anatomy of Criticism* and successfully elaborated, derives from his efforts to understand the complex unity and imaginative status of the Bible. Almost as evident is a kind of proselytizing energy directed toward shaping serious and knowledgeable readers of general literature who will also grasp the way the Bible conditioned the Western imagination. With *The Great Code* has come 'round full circle to summarize and extend a lifetime's quest and to set it out with the panoply of a collateral videotape series, thirty cassettes recording the critic in seminar. This is to be followed by the sequel to *The Great Code*: a second volume more in the nature of detailed commentary on specific biblical works, applying in practice the more abstruse theory.

The theory is a particular expression of his general theory of literature, developed from William Blake's point, which provides Frye with his title, that the Bible is "the Great Code of Art." Frye sees the Bible as a key to the design-making impulses of the human imagination and to language as a generative process accounting for our perception and coordination of different realities: the reality of the self and the external world, of space and time, of whatever is immanent without our experience and whatever transcends it. Since the Bible is imaginative language, it is best understood in terms of how it works within itself, rather than as, say, a historical account of a corner of humanity between two and three thousand years ago. In fact it has very little to do with what we call history, which tries to correspond verbally with some presumed objective order of things. It has more to do with myth, for Frye a complex word, particularly the kind of myth wherein our desires and fears shape the forms and language of narrative and poetry. His program seems simple enough: "Man lives, not directly or nakedly in nature like the animals, but within a mythological universe, a body of assumptions and beliefs developed from his existential concerns. Most of this is held unconsciously, which means that our imaginations may recognize elements of it, when presented in art and literature, without consciously understanding what it is we recognize. . . . One of the practical functions of criticism is, I think, to make us more aware of our mythological conditioning." Such awareness is ultimately undercut by modern empiricism which is at odds with the stages of language in which biblical myth evolved.

Frye sees language undergoing successive cultural phases. His discussion of it is best illustrated, I think, by his remark that the word "God" is meaningless in what he calls the demotic or modern phase of language. Our general "criterion of reality is the source of sense experience in the order of nature, where 'God' is not to be found, and where 'gods' are no longer believed in. Hence . . . the word 'God' becomes linguistically unfunctional, except when confined to special areas," those outside the jurisdiction of empirical criteria. Meaning, in short, requires for Frye that our notions of the biblical God be kept apart from our sense of ordinary history. But where then do we find the biblical "God" and in what order of language does He exist? Well, we find God meaningful in what the Germans call *Heilsgeschichte* or salvation history, as against *Weltgeschichte* or ordinary world history. And the linguistic function that best points toward the biblical God is the power of metaphor or metonymy, where one thing implies another in ways bounded only by the extent of the human imagination. Metaphors, which we think of as imaginative substitutions, move from analogies or parallel relationships to identities of apparently dissimilar things. Hosea may only enact the

relationship of God to faithless Israel by marrying a whore, but if the Gospel of John calls Jesus the Word, that, in the biblical context, is literally true.

As Frye deals with them, the relationship of metaphor to the language of realities, and of both to history, seems telescopic; each is successively contained within the larger context. Hence I prefer mainly to look at the largest, the role of history, in Frye's book, and my preference is supported by his earlier essay, "History and Myth in the Bible," which seems to have been the pilot study for the present book. (The work at hand complicates matters for the reader by being worked out as a symbolic rather than as a logical or linear structure.) The fact is that the real issue the book presents us with is the Bible's status with respect to myth and history. In that context it matters which Bible we are talking about.

For example, *Heilsgeschichte* is a term coined to align the selective historical and prophetic vision of the Hebrew Bible with Christology, the view that biblical history is consummated in Jesus as savior and as himself the meaning of history. With its neat dichotomy of salvation and ordinary history, it does not allow that the Hebraic sense of history may be neither. But it can be said alternatively that the biblical sense of history is dialectic, moving between aspiration or redemptive promise, and an engaged encounter with life as it is, that it is more involved in the sanctification of the process—in the ordinary world, than in a static fulfillment of it. Frye makes much of the biblical process, not, however, as a dialectic, but as the working out of this vast design-making impulse in the collective human imagination. The heart of his theory is in fact how that impulse is exemplified in biblical myth and the typology which serves to bring it all together.

The sections dealing with these are the most important and the most problematic, since they necessarily hang on the Bible's shape as the Christian Bible. It is of course the point of Frye's quest to make sense of that work. A Jewish reader legitimately can only concern himself with what is made of the Hebrew Bible to that end, to ask how it fits in Frye's scheme corresponds with his own sense of it as a distinct and self-contained work.

Overall, the mythic shape of Frye's Bible begins with creation and ends in apocalypse. He sees this one vast myth sequentially unfolding through seven phases: creation, exodus (or revolution), law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse. As narrative, the sequence is structured typologically by relationships of similarly shaped events whose similarity is seen as an underlying identity.

Typology, in traditional Christian exegesis is the idea that things in the Hebrew Bible are types foreshadowing their fulfillment in the life and teachings of Jesus, as, for example, the sacrifice of Isaac is supposed to point to the sacrifice of Jesus. With the advent of biblical Higher Criticism in the last century, typology became suspect precisely because it seemed to distort biblical material into the shape of myths, whereas the modern search has been for the Bible's underlying historical realities. And clearly it falsified Hebrew Scripture, which was not in fact written in anticipation of becoming the Old Testament to the Christian New Testament.

But no such assumption needs to be made in order to recognize that there are nevertheless large underlying patterns of recurrences that unify the two parts of the Christian Bible. The only real inference that can be drawn from them is not that the Old Testament concealed within itself the New, but that the New was shaped to harmonize with the Old. Frye tacitly accepts this, I think, and calls attention to the typological recurrences working entirely within the Hebrew Bible to unify it, such as the prophetic view of restoration as a new creation. And rabbinical or talmudic Judaism, which Frye sees paralleling the New Testament as a completion of the Hebrew Bible, used typology, I would add, to link often parallel portions of the Torah and Haftorah in synagogue readings. Indeed, one suspects this particular practice had much to do with how the early Jewish Christians interpreted the events and traditions that become the Gospels; how, in effect, an imaginative scenario took shape which in turn helped shape the accounts of Jesus. Thus Frye is right to put

typology at the center of his approach to the Christian Bible and to use it to reinforce powerfully his account of the Bible as myth.

Nonetheless, it is far less evident how typology is a shaping force working within the framework of the Hebrew Bible taken by itself. Contending as he does that the Old and New Testaments are mirror images of one another, Frye has to argue that the canon of Hebrew Scripture, from Genesis through Chronicles, anticipates in mythical outline the shape of his overarching biblical myth. But this mythical outline is hard to make out in the shape of the Hebrew Bible. In Frye's terms this may be its deficiency, its incompleteness. But there it is. I would say that the Hebrew Bible has its ulterior model not myth but something the final redactors thought of as a temporal process deeply attached to ordinary history, although clearly not identical with it. Hence, where Frye sees in the last books an analogue for the Apocalypse, it would seem the final redactors thought of it (not entirely without a shaping and distorting bias as ordinary history). *Divrei Hayamim*, the Hebrew name for Chronicles, the last books, means, very roughly "the things that happened."

I should repeat that, for Frye, myth and its apparent antithesis are such qualified terms that his use of them cannot be oversimplified without injustice. But it has to be tried, for with all his careful definition, biblical myth and typology lead Frye into a kind of Platonic (or really an astonishing archaic Neoplatonic) substitution of the greater reality of the mythic Idea the Bible incarnates for the lesser, almost negligible, accidental reality of whatever historical basis there is to the Bible. A limited comparison on these grounds between his work and two other books on the Bible published recently by Robert Alter [*The Art of Biblical Narrative*] and Dan Jacobson [*The Story of the Stories*] makes a point. Both Alter and Jacobson start, as Frye does, with the assumption that biblical narrative is not history but literary fiction, a story or stories shaped by art and, as Alter, sees it, often shaped in typically recurrent patterns. Alter's concern is only with the Hebrew Bible, while Jacobson's is primarily with the Hebrew Bible and with the New Testament as a transposition of what it purports to complete.

Differences of Jewish and Christian perspective are not the issue here, but whether the assumption that literary arts shapes the Bible necessarily leads to a *de facto* if not *de jure* repudiation of the Bible's historicity. For Alter, the function of narrative art in the Bible is to elicit from events what otherwise they do not readily reveal, how human individuality and freedom are in unending tension with a design that is the baffling enigmatic working of God in history. Biblical art points, in short, beyond itself to the human situation in "the perilously momentous realm of history." Similarly, Jacobson insists on the fictive character of biblical narrative, but sees the Bible evolving, as I do, as a historical dialectic in terms of the covenantal sense within Israel of being alternately and recurrently chosen and rejected. Again the significance of the design is geared to the historical frame of reference. If one looks hard enough, one finds that Frye says so too. But in the relative emphases there is a world of difference, for he begins with the sense of the Bible's overwhelmingly mythical design. Hence for him the Bible is really self-referential in way that makes historical concerns irrelevant.

Why insist upon this? The issue can be seen in theological terms worth illustrating in a moment, though they are not my own terms for the significance of these matters. Mine have to do with the conviction that history is more important than art, or rather than art serves history and not the other way around. Very recently I listened to the Russian dissident Aleksandr Ginsburg begin a talk to a college audience in moving words that had a startling biblical ring: "I am a man of no importance in myself. But I bear witness to the truth, to what really happened. And for that reason I was persecuted." Frye might say these words resonate metonymically with the power of their recurring archetype in the Bible. To me they are also a statement about the prior importance of history, of objective truth. This needs to be said derives from a context of biblical literary criticism

in relation to history within which it becomes clear that Frye's work itself is something of a landmark in a modern process of devaluing history.

He begins by disclaiming the authority of speaking from a scholarly consensus. It is conceivable that, as his dated references suggest, he stopped reading purely biblical studies many years ago and simply does not know the extent to which he has become within that field the shaper of a consensus. The *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) along with Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (English translation, 1953) inaugurated a new departure in biblical literary studies: Auerbach with only the short but brilliant first chapter comparing the binding of Isaac story to an episode in Homer's *Odyssey*; and Frye with his programmatic account of literature seen as an extended and elaborate pattern of thought that even then bespoke a biblical shape.

These works appeared when much of biblical scholarship found itself unable to cope adequately with the no longer valid traditional belief that real historical events, corresponding narrowly to the account of them in the Bible, underwrote its truth as divine revelation, and hence as the basis for any theology derived from claims. At that juncture, when a new basis had to be found for affirming what ever truth the Bible possessed, literary criticism, long regarded as reducing the Bible to an aesthetic artifact (like Keats' Grecian Urn murmuring, "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, that is all/Ye know"), suddenly took off with unprecedented boldness to articulate just that basis. It was able to do so for reasons that had nothing to do with biblical studies but a great deal to do with the sense that history was less compelling a form of understanding events than story (compare T.S. Eliot's "We had the experience but missed the meaning"), that fiction in fact "invents" history, which in any case is never more than an arbitrary and selective view of things impossible to know in the totality of possibilities. Beyond this kind of relativistic skepticism about history there was also discernible uneasiness, if not distress, with its burdens as well as its limitations. The best fiction, with Joyce, Proust, and Kafka, had stopped taking historical realism, a correspondence with a linear temporal order of events, as its model. Indeed history, for Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, was the nightmare from which he was trying to awaken and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is a densely associative account of an alternative dream reality progressing less through time than through the sluices of imaginative or verbal congruities. More recently history reappears (as in Thomas Pynchon's fictions) as a wholly invented category whose meaning is necessarily sinister or demonic.

It is against this background, I suggest, that Frye's latest work needs to be seen. Disclaiming any taste for doctrine or theology, he is probably shaping for the future what is already being taught in seminaries as "The Theology of Story" (I quote from a brochure). Certainly he can offer Christian theology, currently in a state of crisis over the issue of historicity, what an Anglican theologian, Don Cupitt, has called for, a breakthrough to a "purified non-realist account of religion." Non-realist in this context means ahistorical with respect to the unknowable realities upon which the central biblical stories are based: in the case of Judaism, the stories of successive covenants by which God made Israel His chosen people, and particularly the Mosaic covenant as the climax of the exodus from Egypt; in the case of Christianity, the story of Jesus, and particularly the account of his last days, climaxing in the resurrection.

There are and no doubt there will always be biblical scholars who try to document these events with the help of the latest archaeological findings, or by elaborating new hypothetical reconstructions of existing evidence. But apart from fundamentalists in both faiths, the movement seems to be in the direction of abandoning what is ordinarily meant by history, while redefining it, as Frye does, as a form of knowledge no whit superior, indeed inferior, to the narrative fictions the Bible offers the major faiths. Whether abandoning means throwing out the baby with the bath water remains to be seen. Frye repeatedly refers to the anxieties his approach provokes. His answer seems to be that there is nothing to fear for the Bible as long as the liberating, life-enhancing character of its larger myth is recognized. Granted our acceptance of his understanding of myth, he

might demur at the tone but should not otherwise object to my paraphrasing in what I take to be his sense, a New Testament exhortation: “Ye shall know the myth and the myth shall make you free.”

Literary criticism is being welcomed by biblical scholars these days as a way out of the impasse of historical criticism. But the impasse is more a crisis than most biblical scholars themselves seem aware of, and I for one am not certain literary criticism can provide answers to questions for which history seems still the arbiter. A regard for history—what another biblical literary critic working this vein called “mere positivistic historicism”—is not simply anxiety. History is a touchstone to which continually we have to refer ourselves if we are not to get lost in imaginative structures, however ingenious, even breathtaking, they are.

So I come back to the point we started from, how the Bible is read seriously. A recent work by George W. Ramsey, *The Quest for the Historical Israel* (John Knox Press, 1981), ends bemused by the unhistoricity of the Bible’s account of Hebrew origins, with a chapter entitled, “If Jericho Was Not Razed, Is Our Faith in Vain?” Put like that, the problem seems slightly comical and probably unimportant to Christians or even to Jews. But the key phrase here paraphrases Paul, who affirmed to his fellow Christians that if Jesus did not indeed rise from the dead then the faith of all Christians was in vain and they were the most miserable of men. There are probably many different kinds of Christians for whom this still matters, as there are Jews who assume they have a meaningful biblical past. There are anxieties. And there are anxieties. Some of them the Bible itself defines, Frye notwithstanding, in terms of a history that went on, that goes on, outside of the Bible. And history can exact fearful penalties if it is underestimated. Or so the Prophets tell us.

10. Globe, Alexander. “Apocalypse Now. Frye’s Vision of the Bible.” *Canadian Literature* 97 (Summer 1983): 182–91.

Northrop Frye’s *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1982) presents the first comprehensive structuralist interpretation of biblical literature. Its publication thus matches the significance of his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), which remains a touchstone of structuralist literary theory. From the title and frontispiece on the debt to Blake remains as deep as it has been since *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) opened that poet to serious academic study. The style of *The Great Code* intensifies Frye’s familiar bricolage. Erudite, unabashedly allusive, extravagantly theoretical, often leaving specific texts unrecognizably in the background, the book is lucid and seminal, exhibiting the author’s formidable power for synthesizing masses of detail into systems that are at once elegantly simple and capable of complex intellectual development. A profoundly original scholar, Frye has also proved a brilliant popularizer, as in *The Educated Imagination*. At a time when the humanities seem under siege, it is gratifying to see Canada’s foremost literary critic figuring as a cover story for *Maclean’s* (April 5, 1981), to see such a demanding book as *The Great Code* displayed prominently in bookshops across the nation and to hear from the publisher that the volume sold over 10,000 copies in Canada during the first five months and reached a fifth printing after a year.

The book grew out of the university classroom, and the introduction deals shrewdly with the problems of teaching the Bible in a secular context by using a mixture of tact, wit, and Socratic irony. The subject is neither biblical scholarship nor theology, nor even the impact of the Bible on the creative imagination,” that is, “how or why a poet might read the Bible” (pp. xxi, xvii). The first part of the volume, “The Order of Words,” consists of four theoretical chapters on language, myth, metaphor, and typology; the second part, “The Order of Types,” mirrors the first with four chapters investigating specific aspects of biblical rhetoric (ch. 8), narrative (ch. 7), imagery (ch. 6), and theme (ch. 5). A promised second volume, awaited impatiently, will survey “the Bible’s relation to Western literature” [xxi].

The organizing principle of the Christian Bible, indeed for *The Great Code* is “Typology” (ch. 4). Early Christians saw Christ as the fulfillment (the antitype) of the Old Testament (with its prefiguring types); appropriately, Frye discusses the royal metaphor at length in this chapter. Unlike modern writing, which bases its conclusions on past observation, typology concerns itself with “the future, and is consequently related primarily to faith, hope and vision” (p. 82). Typology is thus a theory “of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history” [81]. These insights save typology from its too frequent whimsicality: here it becomes the tool for finding thematic coherence in a diversified and self-contradictory book.

Chapter 5, “Typology II: Phases of Revelation,” sets out the book’s *pièce de résistance* of biblical criticism. In 34 breathtaking pages, Frye distills the essence of biblical themes in a structure of thought that many books of several hundred pages fail to convey. Seven roughly chronological biblical stages are distinguished: Creation (with its concomitant Fall), Revolution or Exodus (where God forges the oppressed Hebrews into a nation), Law (which codifies the Revolution), Wisdom (which individualizes the Law), Prophecy (which individualizes the Revolution), Gospel (which as the antitype of all the previous phrases, gives an enlarged vision of the possibilities of human life), and Apocalypse (which destroys the mode of vision that keeps man enslaved in the world of time and history). Occasionally specific texts are treated at length, Creation and Ecclesiastes with particular illumination. But this chapter, more than any other piece of biblical criticism I know, points the way out of the impasse of analytical reading of the Bible. By indicating how each phase contains the seeds of what follows and the fruition of what precedes, Frye recreates the phenomenological experience of the reader familiar enough with the book that he or she can hear in any given text, scripture’s own cross-references and deeper echoes.

Chapter 2, “Myth,” unfolds several important critical commonplaces. *Mythos* is a way of organizing writing, whether narrative stories or conceptual arguments. Myths are not unfactual fictions, but “the stories that tell a society what is important for it to know, whether about its gods, its history, its laws, or its class structure” (p. 33). The didactic element explains why the Bible is so “violently partisan” (p. 40). While history is the record (usually damaging) of what man has already done, myth presents a vision of what man might become. The corresponding seventh chapters deals with biblical myths as “narrative,” that is, as typical action. A U-shaped plot defines its structure, beginning in an ideal situation, descending to the world of disaster, then rising again after repentance to deliverance. The Exodus is seen as the typical action of deliverance, and Christ’s resurrection as the antitype. After a brilliant exposition of the well-worn theme of Exodus typology in the Gospels, Frye throws new light on the myth of the first-born. Jesus, as first-born, becomes the antitype of all the exiles and rejected first sons of the Old Testament, as well as of the Passover lamb and the slayer of the sea monster Leviathan.

Chapter 3 discusses “Metaphor” in terms of self-referentiality. It “is the [Bible’s] words themselves that have the authority, not the events they describe” (p. 60). Acceptable as this statement may be in some current critical theories, it seems more germane to Frye’s thesis of typological development that in different parts of the Bible words are chosen *intentionally* to delineate different *mythoi*. In other words, the system is not as closed as some theories would make it. At any rate, Frye finds the “primary and literal meaning” [61] of the Bible in the interconnection of all its words and the various meanings they evoke. These crystallize into the primal metaphor found at the beginning of John’s Gospel— that Christ and the Word, or the Bible, are identical metaphorically. Chapter 6, “Metaphor II: Imagery,” looks at “the Bible as it appears to practical criticism” (p. 139). Though this could be the least theoretical approach, Frye structures the chapter by contrasting the divine and demonic examples of images that are grouped in a sevenfold hierarchy on pp. 166–67. Such systematic study of images can even untangle textual knots: Revelation 15:6 is discussed on pp.

157–58. The chapter ends by arguing for a comprehensive typology of metaphor, where every image is equal, in fact identical with everything else because Christ holds all categories together.

The first and last chapters on “Language,” reveal what Frye is ultimately essaying in *The Great Code*. Chapter 1 sets out to isolate the particular linguistic mode of the Bible by expanding Vico’s distinction between three types of language that have succeeded each other chronologically. The first “metaphoric” or “hieroglyphic,” type corresponds to a mythic age where the gods are immanent, where mind and body are not divided, where poetry is the primary mode of expression, and where metaphor (this *is* that) use abstractions to talk of a transcendent God. The second, “descriptive” or “demonic” type of language corresponds to the heroic age, where the “soul” is felt to be imprisoned in an alien body, where syllogistic prose becomes the dominant genre, and where metonymy (this is *put in place of that*) uses abstractions to talk of a transcendent God. The third, “descriptive” or “demonic” type of language corresponds to our own anti-metaphysical age, where the “mind” forms part of the human body, where writing becomes scientific, and where truth describes “objective reality” (this is this) and unmask mere appearances.

This scheme provides the second quintessential insight of the book, though the implications affect a type of criticism different from Frye’s. The modern critic lives in a demotic society that communicates descriptively, yet the Bible has metaphoric and metonymic aspects that resist purely descriptive approaches, as a century of historical criticism has shown. The literary critic is faced with even greater complexities, since the Western cultures he studies view the Bible from a variety of different metonymic perspectives. Western writers who use the Bible also introduce a second metaphoric level corresponding to the literary usages of their time, accompanied with a second non-biblical metonymic structure, and (since the Renaissance) a strong dose of the descriptive mode’s distinction of illusion from reality. This outline is the first I have seen in print to grapple with such complexities. Uninterested in pursuing the ramifications of historical considerations, Frye typically catapults the discussion light years farther by trying to integrate all the phases into a new suprametaphoric phase in the last chapter. In the first chapter, after 24 closely reasoned pages, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that the Bible belongs to a fourth class, “oratory” (*kerygma*, to use a New Testament term), which is the vehicle of revelation. At the top of p. 29, Frye even admits an uncharacteristic inability to relate oratory and to Vico’s threefold scheme.

This impasse is created by a confusion between *types* of language and the *means* used to convey ideas. Oratory and revelation are not so much phases of language as *voices* belonging to different phases. Each phase of culture has a different view of truth and a different means of conveying it: revelation unveils reality in the metaphoric phase, oratory or kerygma expounds the truth in the metonymic phase, and description explains facts in our own demotic phase. Thus, in the metaphoric phase it is difficult to distinguish the oracle from the divinity, revelation from reality, the Word from God. Revelation is the vehicle of poetry belonging to the metaphoric phase. The Greeks, for example, speak of “muses,” “Genius,” and “inspiration,” all of them allowing the poet to embody the numinous sphere directly in words: the *Iliad* begins, “Sing, goddess, the wrath of Peleus’ son, Achilles.” In the second phase, reality is not revealed, but mediated. A reasoning audience must be persuaded of the truth through oratory, syllogism, allegory, sermons, commentary, and any other number of metonymic devices. In the classical world rhetoric provides the informing structure, as with Cicero; in medieval ecclesiastical circles, doctrine is the great mediator, as in the sermon or the commentary. The same mediation appears in the poetry of this phase: just as the gods are no longer prime actors in the *Aeneid*, so Vigil mediates the story, beginning “Arms and the man I sing.” In the third phase, persuasion normally consists of explaining the facts, as in the empirical proof for a scientific theory, ideal parliamentary debate, or even Frye’s books. Similarly, the modern epic usually rests squarely on fact or sense perception, and might even delineate a

pluralistic universe, as in the novel or in Browning's *The Ring and the Book*: "Do you see this Ring? . . . Do you see this square old yellow Book . . .? Examine it yourselves!" (I.1, 33, 38).

Where does the Bible fit? Frye rightly points to several metonymic tendencies—its rationalizations (p. 10), the problem of translations (p. 11), its conception of a transcendent God (p. 27), to which could be added the abstract theses in Judges and Kings, the Exodus typology in Hosea and Isaiah 40)55, the elaborate allegories in the New Testament (e.g., Galatians 3:6–29; 4:22–31; James 2:21–24), etc. But, as Frye himself hints, the balance tips more toward the metaphorical in the Bible. Its language is "almost obsessively concrete" (p. 27), with an elemental power when vows are sworn (p. 6) or when God reveals his name in Exodus (p. 17) and speaks to bring Creation into being (p. 18). The Bible usually makes no distinction between subject and object (p. 6), between mind, body, and soul (pp. 19–20), nor, it could be added, between imagination and intention and action (cf. Genesis 3:6 and Matthew 5:21–30). Symbolic gestures and oracles characterize the prophets' activities in the Old Testament, and Jesus preferred teaching in parables and similitudes. God may be transcendent in the Bible, but only in Job, Ecclesiastes and some lamentations is he a *Deus absconditus*. He is immanent in Old Testament history and incarnate in the New Testament. As in all didactic endeavor during the metaphoric phase, the true prophet becomes God's own mouth, revealing the divine will without intermediary: "Thus saith the Lord" is the prophets' formula; Jesus' style is "Verily, verily, I say unto you."

The last chapter, "Language II: Rhetoric" begins with phenomena that a reader stumbles over first: the style of the Authorized Version, the Bible's oral quality, the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, the aphoristic "auguries of innocence," the editorial levelling of "authors," the Bible's capacity for self-recreation, and so on. Here Frye is closest to the descriptive aspects of modern biblical scholarship, though familiar subjects blossom anew under his green thumb. The last dozen pages embark on an ambitious polysemous critique for the Bible, isolating four imaginative levels, or "wider contexts of a continuous sense, unfolding like a plant out of a seed" [221]. The first level is the literal level of myth and metaphor described in chapters 5 and 6. On the second level, myth and metaphor collide with their opposites, the human contexts of history and concept that the Bible grew out of and sought to unify. On this level, "man creates his gods in his own image" [228]. The third level grows dialectically out of the first two, moving from knowledge to the existential plane of faith, which soon meets its complement in doubt. Facing the bedrock of doubt in "the total nothingness of death," the ultimate question becomes, "What speaks to us across our own death?" [230]. This leads to the fourth level, a mode of vision beyond the constraints of myth, history and faith, framed in the language of love. Glimmerings of this kind of vision have shone throughout the book, from Ecclesiastes' "program of continuous mental energy . . . determined to smash . . . through every locked door of repression in his mind" [123] to the metaphors of decentralization, particularly and interpenetration [100, 167–8] where Christ becomes the one knower in a new heaven and a new earth, like Blake's Albion encompassing all, where opposites cease to exist, where nothing is objective, nothing dead, where eternity shines in every grain of sand.

Here Frye passes far beyond anything that can be found in the Bible or in most Western interpretations of the Bible. He ends not as a reader of biblical myth, but as the forger of a new myth substituted for the biblical religions. The concluding vision is radically Romantic (specifically Blakean) in the imaginative sense, subjectivist or idealist in the epistemological sense, totalitarian in the ideological sense, and neoplatonic, gnostic or eastern [cf. 60] in the philosophical and religious senses. Frye is undoubtedly more intellectually impressive and practical than most theoretical critics. But often the Bible disappears from view, so that one is tempted to reach for Dr. Johnson's touchstone: "I refute [Berkeley] *thus*." Some practical problems with Frye's technique can be highlighted by viewing his polysemous critiques from the nonidealist standpoint. His "literal" level confusing subsumes everything "verbal" in the Bible, ranging from the strictly literal to the

figurative, the mythic, the narrative, and the typological [224, 226]. In fact, for Frye this level is less literal than typological. Such a focus may be appropriate for the English Christian tradition, with its Old Testament ending in Malachi's prophecy of the second Elijah proceeding the Messiah, and with its New Testament focusing on *faith* in the *person* of the Christ. But this interpretation allows the Old Testament no voice of its own. The myth, metaphor, and typology of Hebrew scripture concern a *place* that is regained through obedience to the Law: the Hebrew Bible ends with the promise of the restoration of Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23.

Like many literary critics, Frye views the Authorized Version as the *exclusive* vehicle of the “literal” level of the Bible. Indeed, the AV supplies the handbook for biblical myth and metaphor in the English tradition because most English writers read it, and because the metonymic interpretations of the English tradition are embedded in its language and chapter headings. But this position leads to a parochial impatience for everything outside the bailiwick of the AV and its tradition. Critical biblical scholarship is viewed excessively negatively [xvii and note, 202, etc.], while modern textual omissions are attacked without a clear explanation of the facts (pp. 141, 163). Even though the AV is sufficient for English literature or for a general structuralist approach, the reader interested in the myth and metaphor of Mark or Job must become familiar with some of the textual, philological and other knowledge that has accumulated since 1611. Who today would turn to Nahum Tate's acting version of *King Lear* or to the bad quartos for a study of Shakespearean myth and metaphor? For many critics, a more satisfactory treatment of the literal level of the Bible appears in Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, the only book I know other than *The Great Code* to present a synthetic literary approach to the Bible.

Nonidealists will find the emphasis of the second level of history and concept misplaced, since they view texts as creative expressions of writers responding to the cultures they have grown up in. Frye's uneasiness with the Bible's insistent reference to history, to levels of reality outside itself, will have to be limited to one example here. He sweeps aside the differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic translations, commenting that he is “not concerned with the true meaning of such words as *episcopos* or *ecclesia*, but, for the most part, with nouns so concrete that it is practically impossible for any translator to get them wrong” [xiv]. Firstly, even concrete words can change dramatically when they are translated “carried over” from one phase of language to another, as when the metaphoric Hebrew phrases “nostril of God” and “heat of God” become the metonymic English idiom “wrath of God” [cf. another example noted on 18]. Secondly, the connotative overtones of concrete words can change radically when they are incorporated into a structure of thought different from the original. As Frye himself sagaciously points out, “all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery” [*Anatomy* 89]. *The Great Code* takes images from a book of faith and metamorphoses them into a secular manifesto for the imagination. Finally, one sympathizes with the determination not to get bogged down in the quagmire of denominational wrangling, but (as Frye knows) writers have a habit of responding to the intellectual debates of their times. The word *ecclesia*, for example, can stand for different concepts at the heart of quite different views of the world, as a list of a few poets will have to demonstrate: Dante, Langland, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Blake, and Eliot. For each of these writers, the community that the word “church” stands for on the second level resolved into different existential and visionary stances on the third and fourth polysemous levels. King James I realized this when he called for a new translation, not because of any literary deficiencies in the Anglican Bishops' Bible, but because the widely used Calvinist Geneva Bible contained a marginal note to 1 Kings 15:13 exhorting the punishment of monarchs for lapses in piety. James's qualms were fully justified: both his mother and his son were executed as much on religious as political ground. At any rate, Frye's metaphoric critique levels the significant differences between world views that have an historical habit of confronting one another.

Frye's third level of faith is more an imaginative than a doctrinal quality, so that it can be treated here with the fourth level of the fulfilled imagination. This level of vision reduces the Bible *and the entire universe*, with all their superabundant variety and antithesis, to a single monad. Historically, similar views have had a very uneasy relationship with the biblical religions, which have tended to focus on the individual in the existential flux of a history that exhibits elements of good and evil, sin and grace. As an introduction to the Bible and its influence on most Western writers, this fourth level and the participating Apocalypse of chapter 5 are highly misleading. Critically, the goal resembles the *Anatomy*, where a critical meta-system razes the particulars of different books and the individuality of their various authors.

Of course, the historical, non-idealist approach has equally serious shortcomings, which Frye exposes ruthlessly. The contribution of *The Great Code* is to have opened the Bible to students of literature as no other book has. What is even rarer for an academic work, it unfolds a vision of the possibilities of fulfilled human experience, so that the external world enters the argument more seriously than in the *Anatomy*. *The Great Code* will exercise enormous influence in the humanities, the final effect of the book being aesthetic and Frye being the most poetic of scholars. To everything there is a season; with Frye we turn from the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves to a vision where the fire and the rose are one.

11. Gold, Joseph. "Biblical Symmetry: The Gospel According to Frye." *Dalhousie Review* 63 (Autumn 1983): 408–11.

In 1963, Northrop Frye described his discovery that "it was obvious to anyone who read both his books on Blake and on criticism that my critical ideas had been derived from Blake" ["The Road of Excess," *Myth and Symbol*, ed. Bernice Slotte. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 3]. Frye's critical writing has never ceased in its efforts to create a theological and systematic framework out of the visionary art of William Blake. In the essay of twenty years ago that Frye wrote for an anthology on *Myth and Symbol*, he told us that "Blake's prophecies are intensely allusive, though nine-tenths of the allusions are to the Bible. 'The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art,' Blake says, and he thinks of the framework of the Bible, stretching from Creation to Last Judgment and surveying the whole of human history in between, as indicating the framework of the whole of literary experience, and establishing the ultimate context for all works of literature whatever. If the Bible did not exist, at least as a form, it would be necessary for literary critics to invent the same kind of total and definitive verbal structure out of the fragmentary myths and legends and folk tales we have outside it. Such a structure is the first and most indispensable of critical conceptions, the embodiment of the whole of literature as an order of words, as a potentially unified imaginative experience" [15–16]. This leads Frye and us, inexorably and inevitably to his own *Great Code*. Beginning with a criticism derived from Blake, and a view of the Bible learned from Blake and unabashedly used as a title in his latest work, Frye sets out to justify the work of Blake to man. In other words the Bible is a secondary consideration in this process, which has as its primary purpose the twofold task of proving that Blake was right about the Bible and that Frye was right about Blake. Frye is the medium and Blake is the message. Since it appears that Frye's critical approach derived from Blake in the first place, one might be right in detecting the outlines of a tautology in Frye's process. Those who approach the Bible as a highly diversified anthology of historical and literary documents of interest, in detail, in their own right, will find themselves extremely frustrated and excluded by Frye's book. Frye is as good as his word, or his vision of Blake's word, allows, by claiming that the Bible is a model or code of all other literature and that all other literature or "myth" should be read by means of this code.

Professor Frye's book takes its stand on two grounds. It is a version, an interpretation, if one may cautiously call it that, of the Bible. I hesitate to call it commentary because it seeks to be too all-embracing in its conclusions and too thrifty, necessarily, in its details. At the same time, *The Great Code* undoubtedly claims to be a work of literary critical theory, relies heavily on distinctions between metaphor and metonymy, and presents particular figures and incidents as archetypes and prototypes or just types.

For the Bible as a unity, the book asserts that it is one, formative myth that shaped the western mind into what it has always been and what it is still: Fall, Redemption and Apocalypse, Hebrew and Christian scriptures welded into one vision. Since that vision is derived, I believe, from a mixture of the mainstream Christian tradition and Blake's reaction to it, the result, in Frye's books, makes detailed and dialectical response difficult. Blake's works, both poetic and painted, are evangelical, polemical, satirical and myth-making. Frye endorses type and anti-type, angelic and demonic, for "without contraries is no progression." This is Blake reinforced by Hegel. Apocalyptic ideas and images have helped to shape the artist's view. Blake whose revival reached its peak in the sixties, demands enthusiasm and a following, a cult, rather than discourse. Many of these same characteristics find a home in Frye's book. Like Blake, with his *Nobodaddy*, Frye finds occasion to reject the God of the Hebrew Bible as a mistake, a writer's error of understanding. Frye satirizes Solomon, rejects the Hebrews as unenlightened, deplores the failure of man's imagination and the need for a Mosaic code of law by a race of "psychotic apes," and lays a template of order and mythic design on a book that is an anthology of a multitude of beliefs, attitudes and social changes, conflicts, and political history.

When we consider Frye's book as a work of literary criticism we find that here too is peculiarly Frye's own. Woe to the critic who would seek to infer a methodology from all this that might be reproduced elsewhere. Frye's momentum in his text is to move towards a pseudo-Pauline conclusion, a visionary, somewhat mystical assertion that analyzing of the Bible escapes rational organization and that the scriptures are made of the "language of love." We are asked to believe, or embrace this vision which persuades by its energy or conviction or not at all. Yet en route to this conclusion every variety of critical technique has been used: Freudian in considering Adam; reader-response to the Mosaic code; historical in considering the Temple; Form criticism in commentary on Saul and archetypal criticism sprinkled throughout.

Frye's book is in my view reactionary and runs counter to the entire trend of Biblical criticism and its new friendship to literary criticism. As I understand it, the modern thrust of Biblical criticism has been to pay attention to detail, to examine the forces at work in particular stories and poems, to seek for humor, irony, nuance; to see how new historical and archeological information can illuminate obscure places in the text. In the search for Christian roots, in discovery of the oriental models of parable, proverb, and contract, in the renewed discovery of Talmud and Mishnah and Midrash, the modern critic is exploring the riches of Biblical variety. Frye returns us to medieval typology, to theological overviews and to religious concepts of historical destiny, with acknowledgement to Vico and Hegel.

My difficulty with *The Great Code* stems in part from Frye's use of the term "myth." In 1966, Wallace Douglas wrote, "The word is used by critics of many sorts; and, since modern critics constantly deny that they form a single school, it can be expected to have almost as many meanings as critics who use it; as it turns out, the meanings are almost as many as the uses. The word is protean and its fate is procrustean, I would say, if an old-fashioned decorative mythological allusion is still permitted" ["The Meanings of 'Myth' in Modern Literature," in *Myth and Literature*, ed. John Vickery. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966]. The point is a nice one. Once we move away from the classical or pure use of "myth," anything seems to be possible. Since Frye now means by "myth," words in order, presumably a critical concept or assertion of some kind of belief,

how can one differentiate those elements in the Bible that are myth in the sense in which Frye meant myth in 1951, when he wrote in the *Kenyon Review* of “pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folktale.” But sixteen years later Frye wrote the following: “individual works of literature form an imaginative body for which there is (as Aristotle remarked two thousand years ago) no word. If there were such a word, it would be much easier to understand that literature, conceived as such a total imaginative body, is in fact a civilized, expanded and developed mythology” [“Literature and Myth,” in *Relations of Literary Study*, ed. James Thorpe. New York: MLA, 1976, pp. 27–41]. It seems to be that *absence* of the word that Frye regrets in this passage is what one should pay attention to. The only word is “word” and that covers a human cognitive function that has produced a record of linguistic strategies as varied as humankind itself. Wishing that literature were a “total imaginative body” does not make it so and tell us more about Frye than it does about literature or myth. Frye’s use of the trope “body,” including its anatomy, is persistent and recalls in its turn those eighteenth-century drawings and writings, including those of Swedenborg, that pictured the cosmos as a human form. This conception of Frye’s that literature can be managed into coherence, pummelled into shape like a pillow, is Frye’s own need, and one that I do not share. A further fifteen years later, in 1982, Frye tells us that myth and story are one and are just words in sequence, so we can see that Frye has followed an ever-narrowing path that ends in an enhanced grove from which there is no escape. Here all the trees look alike, the weather never varies, time is stopped and sound has become a chant of monotonous harmony. Criticism written in this grove will also lack the charm and poetry of a complexity that metaphor might make infinite. The language of Cleopatra’s love is very different from that of St. Paul and I do not accept that the language of all loves is the same.

In dealing with *The Great Code*, I feel like a minor character in a Feydau farce following the hero, in this case Frye, from room to adjoining room. In the literary criticism room, I object: “How can I find a method in this when it is all vision and breadth and aphorism, bent on the assertion of some giant overview?” “Oh,” I imagine Frye retorting, as he walks into the Bible room, “I am writing of the Bible which is the great, giant myth that forms from our very consciousness as well as our literature.” “But,” I plead, having tagged along to the Bible room, “how can I understand all the vastness of detail and variety and styles and language of the Bible from such a broad description?” “Silly,” says Frye as he returns to the lit. crit. room, “criticism is total unity and coherence and order and is only good when it describes the grand arcs and sweeps of patterns across time.” The temptation to give up argument is awfully strong. Having now written two reviews of this book, I am going to follow Oscar Wilde’s advice and overcome this temptation by yielding to it.

12. Jeffrey, David L. “Encoding and the Reader’s Text.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1982–3): 135–41.

It would be easy to mistake the nature of *The Great Code*. In his introduction to this volume of a continuing excursus Professor Frye tells us that the work attempts a study of the Bible from the point of view of a literary critic. He then goes on to say that the result is not a work either of biblical scholarship or of theology, that at “no point does it speak with the authority of a scholarly consensus.” Rather, “it expresses only my own personal encounter with the Bible” [xi]. The *caveat* is, of course, pre-emptive. It is difficult to take formal issue with a protestation of personal encounter: one cannot very effectively reason or examine evidence for subjectively acquired passions or belief; being outside the experience of the encounter, one is immediately disqualified. And this pre-empting continues to instruct Frye’s reader throughout the book, which is neither a work of literary criticism (although it is a work of literary theory) nor a study of the Bible and literature. In fact, if it were not for the subtitle, one might take *The Great Code* to be a treatise in hermeneutical theology compatible with the work of theorists such as Hegel, Derrida, and Kenneth Burke. As it is, Frye

asks us to read his book as a species of philosophical reflection, and even if the result is not exactly the “rewritten version of the *Anatomy*” [xiv] he says he feared it might be, it does represent a reworking of that structure and body of ideas as the *credo* of a man who at some time has been keenly sensitive to theology, and who now happens to express those interests—with acuity and erudition—as a literary theorist. *The Great Code* asks to be read as a *témoignage*, a personal testament of vision, and read in this way it will be a significant addition to the Frygian corpus.

The theoretical strength of the book is most apparent, I think, in Frye’s discussion of metaphor. Always illuminating on this subject, he is here particularly lucid and provocative, introducing in the “principle of implicit meaning conveyed by the juxtaposition of words” a paradigm for his later discussion of typology. Here, his understanding is rich and his exposition the most useful general aspect of this book for beginning students of the Bible. Arguing that typology is a form of rhetoric open to being studied critically like any other, Frye reminds us that it must nevertheless be understood in the Bible as far more than *merely* another form of rhetoric: “The typological organization of the Bible does present the difficulty, to a secular literary critic, of being unique: no other book in the world, to my knowledge, has a structure even remotely like that of the Christian Bible” [80]. In the Bible typology is really “a mode of thought,” ultimately a “theory of history . . . an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously” [81].

This biblical view of history has not, of course, continued to provide the central model for our own way of “reading” history: much has happened in the last two or three centuries. But a biblical view of history appears to be essential for a reading of the biblical text on any terms that approximate “its own,” and here one senses a kind of critical unsteadiness in Frye’s development of his point. While explicitly acknowledging the centrality of typological modelling to the Bible’s view of itself, and implicitly attributing this kind of reading to great writers in English tradition who have been influenced by the Bible (Langland, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, et al.), he tends himself to make insular judgments—especially in the area of textual interpretation—out of his own distinctive, and distinctively modern, view of history. With respect to the text itself this leads to a kind of revolving mirror effect: now you see it/now you don’t.

Traditional orderings of biblical genres include the category “history,” and for the Hebrew Scriptures this includes the saga history of the Exodus and Esther as well as the lists of “significant” generations in Chronicles and the stylized history of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Samuel. While none of these is history in the full modern sense of the term, all are history in Chaucer’s sense, and probably Shakespeare’s and Milton’s as well. In the New Testament the Gospel writers and their editors arrange their material thematically, but in fact they labor the point about recording actual events. Acts is another saga history, like Exodus, but it sets out to be a missionary history of the early church, and chronicles particular activities for their historical as well as their typological values. To say, as Frye does, that “if anything historically true is in the Bible, it is not there because it is historically true but for different reasons” [40] is, in the appropriate context, to speak defensibly; but to say, by way of concluding the same paragraph, that “the sense of historical fact as such is simply not delimited in the Bible, anywhere,” is either to misrepresent the text or to impose upon it an extraordinary construing of the words “sense of historical fact.” Even as the Gospels strive to relate events in the life of Christ to the Jewish people at a particular place and time, so the book of the Acts of the apostles, as its title suggests, sets out to compose a deliberate history and to communicate a “sense of historical fact” concerning the early life of the Christian community.

In his first letter to the Corinthians (1:18–24) Paul observes that it is the insistence on history, on the life of Christ and his death by crucifixion, that both Hebrews and Greeks find difficult. The Hebrews call for miracles, he observes, while the Greeks look for a wisdom which

concerns itself with principles. Part of the “scandal” of the early church, in the Greek context as well as the Hebrew, is that Christians must insist upon the historical act—the correlate beyond and outside the poetic—and present history as the myth’s fulfillment. Nor is this merely a stratagem for Paul; later in the same letter to the Corinthians he says most pointedly concerning the historical events of Christ’s death and resurrection: “if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless; indeed, we are shown up as witnesses who have committed perjury before God, because we swore in evidence before God that he had raised Christ to life” (1 Cor. 15:14–15, Jerusalem Bible).

It is somewhat unsettling to discover, in this light, that Frye’s division of the canon of the Authorized Version into “seven main phases” for the purposes of his discussion omits altogether Acts, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the entire Pauline corpus [106]. This material composes more than one-half of the bulk of the New Testament, and is foundational to the absorption of biblical matter—especially hermeneutical matter into western culture. Indeed, modern commentators on the Bible as literature, such as H.G. Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, have paid as close attention to St. Paul as did Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Aquinas, and Calvin. Frye himself uses Paul when he wishes to emphasize Paul’s metaphorical interpretation of Old Testament story (e.g., Gal. 4:22–7), but he apparently prefers not to treat the main thrust themselves, namely, their assumption that *lived* history can take the form of a “reading” of the book. Frye speaks as though history were merely “event” and not “meaning”; but from the perspective either of modern scholars “doing” history (e.g., Bloch, Carr, Arendt) or the biblical authors themselves this is to sell oneself short on a major preoccupation of the Bible as *mythos*: for if its typological structure is a unique feature of the Bible, then so also, surely, is its recurrent insistence that the “mythos” be read as history, or with direct correlates to lived history, then and now.

I raised the point about the inter-relatedness of actual and reflected history, not only because the biblical text itself is so emphatic about it, but also because Frye himself acknowledge it (perhaps inadvertently) when he slips in his observation that the Bible is “a violently partisan book . . . a form of “propaganda” [40]. We see by the context that he means “propaganda about history” and not, strictly speaking, intellectual propaganda. More subtly, when Frye suggests that Jesus’ claiming to be a king “while at the same time behaving as a servant . . . is intended among other things to resolve the master-slave dialectic on which the whole of human history turns” [91], he appears at first simply to be reflecting the metaphor of Isaiah or the typological attributions of Paul. But his particularly Hegelian formulation imposes something awkwardly foreign in the text, inviting reflexive associations which are more likely to prove an impediment than an *accessus* to the Bible—especially if our objective is to understand the text, as Frye suggests his book wishes us to, by grasping the intentions of the biblical writers themselves.

Subjectively, a problem not only for the historian but for the literary critic as well, has commended itself to Frye’s special attention. He is unsurprised that “even Francis Bacon wrote a treatise on the ‘Wisdom of the Ancients,’ in which most of the standard Classical myths turned out to be prototypes of the principles of Baconian philosophy” [66]. And he warns us that “the problem of illusion and reality” becomes a central one in third-phase language, the mode of continuous prose in which he and his readers must now work. Modern science has left us with the realization that we can no longer separate the observer from the observed [14]. Frye infers from this that “the observer had to become an observed object too.” What he must mean, I think, is that the observer is unable to get a “fix” on objective reality outside himself, *as* object, since he or she is, within it, part of a co-extensive subjectivity which makes pure observation, in the classic post-Lockean sense, impossible. This realization provides, of course, a necessary conditioning for us all, critics and readers alike. But it does not follow that the text we read must become only an extension of our own subjectivity. Rather, the text exists to draw us towards an external perspective. In the

conversation of our reading it is the mediating object, as language an anchor in the river of our own fugacious words.

Language is the subject with which Frye both begins and, as in a mirror, ends his book. The issue is the more appropriate since the Bible, as text, is almost as concerned with the problem of language as it is with the problem of history. And the Bible, not written in the third-phase language of continuous prose, seems somewhat easier to read on the subject than much third-phase commentary, in which, according to Frye, “if A and B seem to be inconsistent, one can always insert intermediary verbal formulas . . . : if only we write enough of such intermediate sentences, any statement whatever can eventually be reconciled with any other statement” [10]. If this notion seems a trifle unnerving, it is at least an honest *caveat lector*: the reader has no excuse for not keeping his eyes open.

It is partly because Frye can do such marvelous things with a text (such as in his illuminating discussion of Ecclesiastes, [123–25], and because he has such an evidently rich sense of language (such as is deployed here to fine critical effect in his discussion of the two arks [177 ff.]), that I found myself repeatedly distressed by what seem to be examples of a kind of semantic and rhetorical sleight of hand, intermediations by which the obvious could be made into mist, or (Frygian) method, and the text itself subtly subverted. I instance two examples.

The first I have chosen appears when Frye, to appropriate his own established system, is speaking of the earth-mother motif in mythology generally. He writes: “We catch many glimpses of this earth-goddess in the Bible, along with her subordinate, usually male, companions who represents the cycle of life and death itself, as she represents the continuing process underlying it. This companion may be her son, her lover, or a ‘dying god,’ a victim either of herself or of some aspect of the ‘dead’ time of year, whether winter or the late summer draught. Venus and Eros (Cupid), Venus and Mars, Venus and Adonis, are the familiar forms of this threefold relationship in Classical mythology” [69]. Without telling us where in the Bible these “glimpses” are to be had (they must be fleeting indeed), Frye goes on to say that Venus/Eros and Venus/Adonis have their “Christian counterparts in the Madonna-Child and Pieta pictures” (he is thinking of Renaissance painting, one supposes; the comparisons are surely not be generated from the Bible), and he moves, in the same paragraph, via Robert Graves to Artemis, whom in turn he identifies with “the many-breasted ‘Diana of the Ephesians’ who appears in Acts 19.” In fact, the Diana-type has no place in the biblical mythos at all, and is mentioned in the Acts passage only in connection with a near riot that took place when the Ephesians began to fear the preaching of Paul as an overt threat to a culture-related tourist trade. The paragraph serves to rationalize an aspect of Frye’s system, but at the expense of misleading the reader concerning the amenability of the Bible to that system.

On a related note Frye speaks of the forgiven harlot as “an intermediate bridal figure between the demonic Whore and the apocalyptic Bride” [141], suggesting that she appears as “the sinner of Luke 7:37–50, often identified with the Mary Magdalene” and the woman taken in adultery in John 8. He then inserts this sentence: “The word ‘eros’ does not occur in the New Testament, but the woman whose sins were forgiven because she ‘loved much’ (Luke 7:47) is there to remind us that if there is anything inhuman nature worth redeeming, it is inseparable from Eros” [141]. The sense of the Luke passage, discernible in the context of the Authorized Version (particularly the immediately preceding parable of vv. 41–4), and more properly represented in other translations, is: “I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love” (Luke 7:47, Jerusalem Bible). The emphasis in the text is entirely on forgiveness, and the word for love is *agape*, not *eros*: indeed, the fact Frye acknowledges, that “eros does not occur in the New Testament,” is perhaps never more meaningfully relevant than in this passage, and his own assertion concerning why the incident is recorded, however romantically attractive or amenable to his own argument, could hardly be farther from the point of the text.

Other examples of infelicitous interpretation of text could be cited: a dubious exegesis of the doubting Thomas dialogue [46], a particularly precious paragraph about the Noah story [143], and what I hope is a tongue-in-cheek assertion that Proverbs 19:18 (“Chasten the son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying”) “has probably been responsible for more physical pain than any other sentence ever written” [121]. There are, as well, a number of confusing assertions, such as Frye’s claim that “individuality is of so little importance in the Bible.” It is, I think, a commonplace among students of ancient literatures that the highly individualized characterizations of Jacob, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, to take a few examples, are among the hallmark achievements of biblical literature, and it is evident both in the Old and New Testaments that personality distinctively shapes the message or *kerygma*—even to the point where it causes some specific problems of contested interpretation in the life of the early church (e.g., Peter vs. Paul in Acts). It is Frye’s contention that “there are no true rational arguments in the Bible” [27]. (Not “truly rational,” one should notice, but “true rational . . .”) While it is impossible say, in Frye’s case, whether this statement is his deduction from the Bible (in his schema he is able to avoid a systematic examination of Romans, Colossians, and Paul’s Athenian discourse, for example) or from another source, it does seem reasonable for the reader to suspect the formulation of rhetorical “loading” at least, and to wonder if the matter should not be checked out more inductively.

For my own general points of reservation, the emphasis that the Bible faces on history and the way it uses language, I think we may see that the issue is not, in theory, “religious”—though it may be, of course, as has been argued before, that Frye’s own motive is more religious than he admits. The issue raised by Frye’s method, nonetheless, would seem to be one of authority—the authority of the text. How does a text, any text, generate authority for its readers? If we are to respect its own language, probably no text has been more careful in addressing this point than the Bible. When, by way of contrast, Frye reminds us that the “basis of authority in third-phase writing is the social consensus that the writer appeals to” [21], we should recognize that at no point is the Bible more evidently out of phase with our own modes of writing and reading. But this suggests a problem for third-phase criticism which should be acknowledged at the outset, I think: that while the Bible explicitly asks that authority be granted to the author (or Author), we tend to want to retain authority for ourselves, even if sometimes we do this in the name of “consensus,” or “logic,” or “system.” I am not, of course, saying that the Bible’s way is the only way to read it; I am saying that a peculiar feature of the biblical anthology is that it repeatedly asks for this, that this feature is central to its manner of “telling” (or narrative) as well as its “telling forth” (the *kerygma* of which Frye speaks). The question of authority in the Bible or (to speak at Frye’s metaphorical level) of ultimate authorship is, if anything, even more important to the Bible’s view of itself as text than is its commitment to history or its care for language, and it deserves to be more straightforwardly recognized.

Frye has written a thoughtful and provocative book, one which goes far towards giving us a sense of the genesis (as much as a concluding revelation) of his own code and system. As the simultaneous release of his commercial television video series under the heading *The Bible and Literature* suggests, the tendency will be for “the media” as well as teachers of literature to use this book as though it were an authoritative pronouncement on its advertised subject. This would be a mistake. Perhaps the fault lies as much with the titles as with anything else. Beyond that, one must have hopes for the promised second volume, that Frye’s powers as literary critic will be directed more than they have been towards the core narratives and foundational language of his principal text. For what is most conspicuous by its absence from Frye’s *Great Code* is an integral sense of the Bible itself.

13. Levine, Herbert J. “How Many Bibles?” *Georgia Review* 36 (Winter 1082): 900–4.

What useful work in our culture can the Bible do when it is freed from the possession of a particular religious tradition? In our century, severe limits on its applicability have often been imposed by two opposing kinds of know-nothing literalism. Fundamentalists, both Christian and Jewish, insist on using the Bible's purported literal truth for implementing social policy—from Arkansas' creationist law to Israeli settlements on the West Bank. Secularists use the same standard of literalism to reject the Bible entirely, arguing that this tissue of legends and myths cannot possibly be of concern to intellectuals attempting to build a lasting culture. Ironically, they turn to Karl Marx, whose sense of history progressively unfolding toward the fulfillment of a great destiny in itself based on the Bible that they spurn.

This last identification of Marxism with Biblical teleology is made by Northrop Frye in his new work on the Bible, the first of two projected volumes. Both he and Robert Alter set out to undermine the ignorant respect or disdain that permeates our culture's attitudes to the Bible. The two books share the goal of liberating the Bible from narrow doctrinal or historicist perspectives. They are also comparable in finding the existing, generally excavative Biblical scholarship inadequate to their purposes as Bible readers, since it chops into bits what most readers experience as wholes. They are comparable finally in their concern with showing general readers, rather than specialists, how the imaginative authority of the Bible is established: Alter does so by exploring in detail the narrative techniques of the Hebrew Bible, while Frye provides a taxonomy of the images and broad narrative outlines of the Christian Bible. Yet, for all their similarity of purpose and audience, the two books exist in utterly incompatible universes of discourse, bifurcating along the lines of their respective religious orientations. Though both authors secularize their traditions, each is a propagandist for a vision of the world that emerges from those two vastly different books, the Jewish and the Christian Bibles. Their two literary approaches need to be read in conjunction with one another, so that we can begin to gauge the usefulness of each Bible as a model for living in a secular world.

Alter has always in view the general character and values of the Hebrew Biblical narrative, yet his method is radically and brilliantly inductive. Bringing to bear his expertise both as Hebraist and as critic of the modern novel, he pays minute attention to the verbal style of the Hebrew, provides his own excellent translations, and teaches the reader to attend to the stylistic choices (mostly accessible in the King James version), which create patterns of significance within and between Biblical stories. He illuminates such singular Biblical techniques as variations in verbatim repetition and contrastive dialogue in lieu of explicit characterization (anticipating Flaubert), and thus succeeds in penetrating the reticence of these highly purposeful ancient narratives. He shows us the striking individuality of figures like Rebecca or David, whom we feel we have never known so well as in his treatment. Central to Alter's analyses is his imploding of the conventional opposition between fiction and history: in the Bible, history is given the imaginative definition of fiction, while legendary fiction acquires the moral consequentiality of history. Throughout the historicized prose fiction stretching from Genesis through Kings, Alter discerns a central tension between the divine plan and the disorderly character of historical events, between God's will and human freedom. He concentrates our attention on the complex ambiguities of motive and character that, he claims, are essential aspects of the Bible's vision: "That man must live before God, in the transforming medium of time, incessantly and perplexingly in relation with others" (p. 32). Through contrastive glances at ancient Near Eastern epics (unfortunately, too briefly handled to gain scholarly credence), Alter intimates that this socio-temporal way of looking at character, so central to our culture, is itself an invention, and perhaps the most important one, of Jewish monotheism.

Where Alter is empirical and inductive, Frye is theoretical and deductive. Readers familiar with Frye's earlier work will recognize in the current book his emphasis on the general comedic

pattern of the Christian Bible, a book with a U-shaped plot: the Old Testament begins with the Edenic moment of bliss, is disturbed utterly by mankind's fall, and proceeds through a periodic series of up and downs for God's chosen people; the New Testament replaces the sequence by a single act of descent to the lower world by the epic hero, Jesus, who completes the U by restoring the fallen world to the initial image of its divinity, a leap out of time into the New Heaven and Earth of Revelations. Frye presents the Christian Bible in seven phases, existing in a dialectical relationship in which each incorporates and supplants the previous one: creation, revolution, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse. Unlike Alter, who attends to each ironic story as a miracle of individuation, Frye, like the authors he quotes—Dante, Milton, Blake—knows the Bible as one happy story of deliverance, the whole of the Old Testament foreshortened by Christian typology into the Fall and the Exodus, the whole of the New Testament into the Incarnation and Apocalypse. Frye deftly organizes all of the Bible's images, "freezing" them into a "single giant metaphor for human life, all categories identified, either positively or parodically, with the one hero, Christ."

In *The Great Code* Frye creates a discourse about the Bible that attempts to tap what he sees as its metaphoric, atemporal inspiration. In the Hebrew Bible, according to Frye, an individual finds his fulfillment within a social body—hence, the centrality of the royal metaphor, in which the king represents the people. In the Christian Bible, however, the direction of the metaphoric process is reversed. Rather than being integrated into the community, the individual takes the total body of the world, synonymous with Christ, into himself, on the model of the Eucharist. In Frye's view, all aspects of the Bible conspire toward this "decentralizing" end. As metaphoric discourse, the Bible demands that we find its meaning in the centripetal connection of words with one another, not from any references to the world outside the text (e.g., we are not meant to look for any great fish outside the pages of Jonah). As myth, the Bible adds to this poetic aspect of language the social or concerned dimension, making itself a program for action. As typology, it offers a special temporal form of the repeatability of myth, subordinating all of history to its absolute beginning and absolute end. "The real world," says Frye, "is beyond time, but can be reached only by a process that goes on in time" [76].

At the risk of oversimplifying Alter and Frye, the one's Bible points into history, the other's beyond history. A good deal of this difference derives from where each Bible ends and from the unified perspective made possible by that ending. Subordinating prophetic eschatology to actual historical renewal, the Hebrew Bible ends with the description in Chronicles of the Persian proclamation allowing the Jews to return to Zion and rebuild their temple. In the Christian Bible, the Old Testament ends with Malachi's prophecy of the coming "day of the Lord" to be heralded by Elijah's return, thus providing a typological link to John the Baptist, the new Elijah, and his Messiah. By ending the New Testament with the vision of re-created heaven and earth, Revelations (according to Frye) relocates eschatology at the center of the Biblical corpus.

Though the two Bibles end in radically different ways, they share the same beginning: the creation story that initiates human history. Comparing Alter and Frye's treatment of the opening chapters of Genesis provides us with an instructive example of how our culture imaginatively uses each Bible. Drawing upon the findings of Biblical scholarship that disclose two distinct accounts of creation, Alter nevertheless rejects the conventional assumption that the writer/editor slavishly followed two sacred, contradictory traditions: one focusing on the divine plan and the orderly creation in seven days, culminating in the simultaneous and equal creation of man and woman; the other depicting man's emergence from the earth before the other creatures, and the separate, unequal creation of Eve from Adam's rib. Alter convincingly argues that the writer chose to include both stories precisely in order to accommodate a greater degree of complexity in this crucial account of beginnings. Thus, God is not only transcendent, "magisterial in His omnipotence," but also

immanent, “actively, emphatically involved with His creation” [147], however, untidy its human reality. Similarly, two perspectives on the creation of woman are necessary to reflect “the contradictory facts of woman’s role in the post-Edenic scheme of things” [145–46]: worthy partner and equal (witness, Alter reminds us, the gallery of remarkable women in Genesis), yet greatly restricted in her legal and institutional privileges. Alter directs our attention to this composite story of beginnings because it continues to reflect so many complexities of our own world.

Frye, on the contrary, finds nothing to recommend in the Bible’s creation myth. As the first of the Bible’s seven phases, creation exists only to be superseded by superior visions of how human life is to be organized. Therefore, he denigrates the God of Genesis as patriarchal and repressive. He balks at the artificial connection of the creation and the Sabbath and denigrates the myth of the fall for projecting onto mankind’s moral life the biological problem of death. Christianity explains any deficiencies in creation with reference to the fall and the hierarchy it established between a “good” divine nature and a “fallen” human one, putting man in the position of having to choose either to rise above or sink below his place at birth. Though Frye takes pains to point out that both science and moral philosophy have dismantled this symbolic hierarchy (there being no evidence that an upper level was ever natural to any part of creation), he nevertheless retains this hierarchy for his own system, only shifting it to a sacred, aesthetic ground. “For us,” he writes, “human creativity is still thought of as purgatorial, as a way of raising the level of human nature” [113].

The Christian Bible provides Frye with a structure of salvation that offers its metaphorical identification of God and man, and its mythic return to a new, superior creation. But the community of faith that has until now possessed and shackled this visionary Bible is to be replaced, in Frye’s view, by a community of vision that will accept its internalizing metaphorical structure without its God. Divorcing himself from the revolutionary social energies of the Biblical religions, Frye several times makes an explicit link between his sense of the Bible’s metaphoric structure and Buddhist notions of interpenetration. Quoting approvingly the Buddhist philosopher Suzuki, Frye seems to look forward to the “annihilating of space and time as we know them, of the disappearance of shadows in a world where everything shines by its own light” [168].

If this is Frye’s understanding of the useful work the Bible can do in our culture, it is no wonder he makes the startling claim that “individuality is of so little importance in the Bible” [212]. In contrast, Alter’s book, following the lead of Eric Auerbach’s famous analysis of realism in both Testaments, is devoted to providing the opposite case: “The Biblical writers fashion their personages with a complicated, sometimes alluring, often fiercely insistent individuality because it is in the stubbornness of human individuality that each man and woman encounters God, or ignores Him, responds to or resists Him” [189]. Both writers claim that their analyses of the Bible point to the essence of human freedom, but freedom for what? In Alter, it is the freedom to engage in the world’s pursuits, to be caught up in the struggle to make meaning, to challenge oneself against the recorded standard of divinity, however problematic that standard of interaction may be. In Frye, creator and creature are simply projections of the master-slave duality; for him, true freedom lies in smashing the anxiety-structures we build around our social and religious institutions. The Christian notion of original sin, claiming that man cannot fulfill his destiny without divine help, simply expresses (in Frye’s liberated view) man’s fear of his own freedom. The ex-Christian Frye, who has apparently passed beyond good and evil, imagines us as self-delighting, self-enlightening beings capable of our own redemption. The liberal Jew Alter imagines no redemption whatsoever, only the difficult task of living in history.

14. Mandel, Eli. “Tautology as Truth and Vision.” *Canadian Forum* 62 (September 1982): 30–1.

In the “Preface” to her translation of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak cites Jean Hyppolite’s essay on the “Preface” to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* to the effect that no preface should be taken seriously. It is a contradiction in terms. Yet Hegel, an inveterate writer of prefaces, loved dialectic, in the process by which opposites pass through one another, or negate themselves to create new forms. It is worth considering what this implies about the reality of texts. The point is of some significance to in assessing the prefatory and dialectical nature of Northrop Frye’s *The Great Code*. The book is, for one thing, Professor Frye’s most extended consideration in what lies behind the Bible as the major fiction of Western culture. It is, for another, a brilliant display of the means by which such an extended consideration can take place, in other words, the kinds of evasions, ironies, riddling, and paradoxes involved and the subsequent anxieties (that is, resistances) the reader must struggle with as his questions are brushed aside or objections made light of. Reading Frye, I confess to some very strong anxieties myself, first, to finding the Bible (defined as the AV) held within a fairly rigidly controlled Protestant context, when my training and experience (limited as it is) is Jewish, and second, to hearing, throughout, the rhythm, tonality, and the mode of rhetoric here called “kerygma,” the vehicle of revelation or exhortation. A later definition alters this oracular sense to love, but the first seems dominant.

The book has been spoken of as Professor Frye’s passion, and I think, in the most usual senses of the word, that is a true observation. It is, without question, an expression of his “own personal encounter with the Bible” and his powerful visionary sense of its language and structure. Part of his enormously impressive control of the argument being carried on is, of course, derived from his extraordinary range of knowledge, even in a field in which he steadily disclaims scholarly competence. Passages alluded to make up a five-page triple column index at the end of the text. Part derives from his determination to keep the argument at the level of establishing perspectives, not of adding to knowledge. Much of the method is prefatory and the line of argument is rather more insistently and starkly present than a book more at ease with itself would allow. Still, considering that the method makes *all* of Frye’s work to this point *prefatory* to a work yet to be written, it becomes clear the method requires a very considerable act of intellectual courage. And *that*, I think is the quality shining through this work. That, plus a curious sense of restraint that leaves the reader with the feeling that the final revelation has been deliberately withheld. We will await also the promised “fairly thorough inductive survey of Biblical narrative and imagery.”

The Great Code is a work of literary criticism. It is a study not of the content of the Bible, though it has much to say of its relation to history, its social fervor, its psychological insights, and its theology. Its concern is the imaginative form of the work, the language of the Bible, the structure and images of the Bible, Or, at one further remove, What questions do we ask in talking of those aspects of the work? The book addresses the question of what the Bible means, or more precisely *how* the Bible means. This Frye sees as two great fields of inquiry, one occupying part one of this book, “The Order of Words,” the second occupying part two, “The Order of Types.” The first may be taken as an inquiry into the language of the Bible, the language Frye calls here “the rhetoric of religion.” The second is an inquiry into structure, narrative and imagery. The linguistic context is set out first as a kind of history of language through its metaphoric, metonymic, and descriptive phases. This leads in turn to discussions of myth, metaphor, and typology. Lurking behind the linguistic question are the historical and doctrinal ones, while the initial problem seems to be the clearing away of referential, analogical, and secondary theories of meaning.

Frye’s theory of meaning and language is one we have met before, notably in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, but it seems more crowded in this new context and may suffer accordingly. Or it may be that the range of questions has increased as linguistic inquiry presses more insistently on all fields. In any event, Frye welcomes the “heavy . . . emphasis on language and linguistic models in

contemporary thought” and seeks to bring some new conceptions to bear on the questions at hand. Yet some of his versions of metaphor and myth (the relation between word and object, for example) seem to me oddly uncertain because of the varying views they offer. But at its most radical his position is clear: first “the unity (of the Bible) is not primarily . . . a metonymic consistency of doctrine addressed to our faith: it is a unity of narrative and imagery and what we have called implicit metaphor,” and second, “the Bible deliberately subordinates its referential or centrifugal meaning to its primary, syntactical, centripetal meaning.” These apparently simple principles are not so much concerned to deny all allegorical meaning of the Bible as to cut off its historical roots. The radical implications are worked out in the second part of the argument, “The Order of Types.”

From one perspective, the argument separates the Bible from history to rid the sacred book of the most vexing questions about the Bible’s relation to historical truth. This, as we see shortly, does not remove it from historical process. In fact, one of the most intriguing parts of Frye’s argument is the connection of Marxism with the revolutionary implications of the Biblical social gospel. But if “The Order of Words” concerns the literal meaning of the Bible, that is, its centripetal and syntactical meaning, “The Order of Types” views the Bible as a structure of narrative with similar intent. “Literally, the Bible is a gigantic myth, a narrative extending over the whole of time from creation to apocalypse, unified by a body of recurring imagery that ‘freezes’ into a single metaphor cluster . . . identified with the body of the Messiah.” This means that questions of the historical Jesus too disappear. Christ is here the word of God, the scripture itself. It seems we are left with an alternate identification: if not history, then poetry.

True, the Bible is in large part poetry. True, its language is poetic. If by poetic we mean detached, autonomous, self-referential. Yet, objects Frye, “the Bible taken as a poem is so spectacularly bad a poem that to accept it all as poetry would raise more questions than it solves.” Myth is another matter. Of its two aspects—as concerned knowledge and structure—it is the second that is Frye’s major interest. As part of his typological study his analysis traces a sequence of seven phases extending from creation to apocalypse, each a wider perspective on its predecessor, a type of the one following it, a dialectical progression in the process of revelation. These constitute expanding views of structure, the casting off of social tyranny, the meaning of the codes that provide integrated and continuous life and develop to prophetic and imaginative vision. It is here we see how, though distinct from history, the Bible provides a comment on historical process.

Viewed structurally rather than thematically, mythic narrative provides a series of descents, each a type of the crucifixion itself. Such narratives, again, are myths, not history and if obliquely related to literature remain nonetheless more than literature. As myth, the Bible is unified but discontinuous. It is not an expression of originality but of the transformation of individuality in the language of correspondences and rhetoric of love. But it is especially in the typological structure of the Bible that the meaning of “The Order of Types” is to be found, that is, in its reflexiveness and redundancy, its syntactical arrangement and its inward intensity: “How do we know the Gospel story is true? Because it confirms the prophecies of the Old Testament. But how do we know the Old Testament prophecies are true? Because they are confirmed by the Gospel Story. . . . The two testaments form a double mirror each reflecting the other *but neither the world outside*” [78, my emphasis]. After reading that passage its worth thinking again about the double mirror structure of *The Great Code*.

This is one of the great tautologies, but not the only one, in Frye’s argument. He says too: “The Christian Bible is a written book that refers to a speaking presence in history.” The presence is Christ who is the word of God which is the Bible. So on syntactical as opposed to referential meaning, tautology as opposed to metonymy, the great argument for the authority if vision and faith is built.

It would be difficult, I think, to deny that there are uncomfortable moments in this book. It acknowledges some of the profound difficulties in the argument (that God is cruel and vindictive in the AV) but usually finds a way, if tautological, out of them. Sometimes, it is too evasive by half, as in the easy assertion: “I use their version (the translation of the AV) because, as they explain . . . they were not trying to make a new translation but a traditional one.” Whose traditions? one asks. Some assertions about language are never resolved in later stages of the argument: “The central expression of metaphor is the ‘god’, the being who, as sun-god, war-god, sea-god, or whatever, identifies a form of personality with an aspect of nature.” But granted these problems and the more pervasive one of the tone of kerygma it is difficult to be less than enormously impressed by the intelligence, passion, wit, and sweep of the great argument.

15. Poland, Lynn. “The Secret Gospel of Northrop Frye.” *Journal of Religion* 64 (October 1984): 513–19.

The Great Code is unmistakably the work of Northrop Frye—a scholar whose writings, like the literary universe he proposes, comprise a remarkably unified “order of words,” each a kind of type and antitype of the others. As Frye puts it himself in another metaphor, “I think I have found a trail, and all I can do is to keep sniffing along it until either scent or nose fails me.”¹

The title by omission obscures its Blakean origin—“The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art”—although Blake and Blake’s Bible mark the beginning of Frye’s trail and remain the master types of the Fryean universe.² In fact, Frye’s gloss on this passage from Blake is also a compressed statement of several of his own guiding assumptions. Blake, writes Frye, “thinks of the framework of the Bible, stretching from Creation to Last Judgement and surveying the whole of human history in between, as indicating the whole of literary experience, and establishing the ultimate context for all works of literature whatever.” If the Bible did not exist, Frye almost says, literary critics would have to invent it, since to imagine the totality of literature as a single, cohesive verbal structure is for Frye “the first and most indispensable of critical assumptions.”³

The Great Code, the first of two proposed volumes, presents us with two readings of the Bible at the same time. On the one hand, it performs an anatomy of the Old and New Testaments (in the Authorized Version of 1611) read as a structurally unified single work. But in keeping with the full Blakean title, the volume also reads the Christian Bible as the code, or perhaps key to the code, of Western culture. As such, the Bible is perceived not only as a central influence on the western literary canon but also as a kind of microcosm within which the imaginative experience of all of Western civilization is contained.

As Albert Schweitzer noted in 1906, the Bible has a way of exposing its critics’ implicit theologies. And *The Great Code*, in addition to being a highly original work by a distinguished literary scholar, is also the testament of a religious vision—a vision present, though more veiled, in Frye’s earlier writings as well.

I

When the *Anatomy of Criticism* appeared in 1957, the era was still, for the most part, that of the New Criticism, a period that was, in sensibility if not entirely in critical assumptions, stridently anti-Romantic. The “Romantic attitude,” for Hulme, Eliot, and their New Critical heirs, was both a symptom of and an escape from the central given of the modern situation: the absence of a unified religious and cultural tradition and thus the “dissociation of modern sensibility.” And as for their neoorthodox theological counterparts of the same period, so for these critics the appropriate “attitude” included a keen sense of human limit and fallibility and a conviction that the way up was the way down, or through, the contradictions and complexities of concrete human experience. With words like “irony,” “ambiguity,” “paradox,” and “conflict”

as their central metaphors, it is clear why to both critic and theologian the Romantic trust in the goodness of human nature (and the Romantic project, to create alternative worlds) could only appear as hubris, a confusion of the divine and the human, and as a denial of original sin.

In this context, the *Anatomy* is clearly the work of a Romantic sensibility. Where the New Critics stress the tragic and ironic, Frye's supreme mythoi are not autumn or winter but spring and summer, romance, rebirth, and comic reconciliation. Where for the modern critical tradition art's vocation lay in creating "analogies" of unity in complexity, for Frye literature is the expression of human freedom from the "external compulsions" of our environment. The action of comedy, as Frye describes it, is from law (always "arbitrary law") to liberty; from habit, ritual bondage, or "whatever is fixed or definable" to freedom; from illusion to reality.⁴ The locus of the Real and the arena of authentic human being is for Frye (as for Eliade) not that of the "terrors of history" but that of mythopoesis. "Our real and repressed social past," Frye writes, is not the past of "historical record" but "the great dramas of the arts" with their visions of what humanity might do and human life might possibly be.⁵

The importance of the *Anatomy* in critical history is firmly established, and while there are at present fewer critics eager to debate, adopt, or revise Frye's system, his recovery of comedy and the romance traditions for the modern imagination remains a permanent achievement. It is therefore interesting to note how infrequently those biblical scholars who have begun to make use of literary theories in recent years have turned to Frye.⁶ One suspects that the predominant influence of the New Criticism on biblical scholars has to do not only with its long reign over departments of literature but also with the fact that the literary qualities to which this mode of criticism is most sensitive were also part of the theological atmosphere in which many of the biblical scholars were trained. One thinks, for example, of how readily New Critical theories of metaphor and paradox become Bultmannian readings of the parables as "events" that shatter or overturn our expectations. Or of the enormous influence of the first chapter of Auerbach's *Mimesis*, with its emphasis on multilayeredness, tension, depth, and conflict. Or of Robert Alter's recent *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and its focus on complexity and ambiguity, the contradictory and the multifaceted. Or even of Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*, with its interest in fragments, ruptures, and secrets and in how the Gospel narratives conceal their revelations and resist interpretation.⁷ When placed beside these studies, Frye's Bible seems a clean, well-lighted place. There is mystery in Frye's Scripture, but the radiance lies less in its verbal structures than in the transformed consciousness it effects in its readers.

We live, Frye has persistently argued, not "nakedly" in nature like the animals but instead within a vast "envelope" we have constructed out of our imaginations; we live within nature recreated in human form. The verbal part of this envelope Frye calls "mythology": "The total structure of human creation conveyed by words, with literature at its center."⁸ Myth, in two favorite Fryean tropes, is centripetal and like a mirror—it reflects human desire rather than looking directly at nature outside. "Desire," in Frye's lexicon, is the energy that impels this creative process, while myth (literature is "matured myth") provides the forms that liberate desire into expression and endow it with a telos. Civilization, culture, myth, and literature thus become nearly synonyms in Frye's universe since all "creative human work" as he defines it aims at transforming nature into human shape—a task in which myth and the arts function as both formal and final cause.

The literary critic clearly has a privileged perspective in this schema. For if one stands back from Western culture as one does from a painting (another of Frye's favored images), one sees a single ordered whole, and from this circumference one can discern the archetypal structuring principles that recur in "displaced" versions throughout history and provide it with a traceable shape.

On the one hand, Frye's notion of a "total order of words" is simply a hypothesis, the heuristic assumption that makes possible the kind of "scientific" criticism illustrated by the *Anatomy*. But Frye's hypothesis also seems to become for him a kind of religious faith, the vision of a redemptive alternative to the narcissism of original genius and private worlds of which Hulme and Eliot were so wary. Frye has other names for desire and the "order of words." He also speaks of "the universal spirit of poetry" working

through the individual poet and of “the law of art itself,” which “seeks constantly to reshape itself from its own depths.”⁹ Culture itself, for Frye, is testimony to the presence of something larger than the individual poet or worker or even, in his recent writing, the individual religious community of “professed belief.” In Frye’s recent Larkin-Stuart lectures, myth and desire become Word and spirit, “the power that has created all our works of culture and imagination and is still ready to recreate both our society and ourselves.”¹⁰

II

We see the double character of Frye’s hypothesis in *The Great Code* as well. For Frye the literary critic, the Bible is a “gigantic myth” [224] structured typologically. Thus Frye shows us seven phases of revelation (from creation to apocalypse), each of which recapitulates and expands the phase before. We see the narrative structure of the Bible as a series of falls and rises, each a version of the expulsion from Eden and the deliverance from Egypt. And we discern the Bible’s structure of imagery: the “apocalyptic world” of sheep and pasture, harvest and vintage, of Jerusalem, bride and virgin, and its “demonic” counterpart of wilderness, whore, and heathen city.

While much of this typology will not be new for one familiar with medieval literature or the Christian liturgical tradition, the scope of Frye’s undertaking and the breadth of his erudition are, as always, dazzling. And the volume contains a host of incidental insights that happily arrest one’s progress on what could become at times a too well marked path. Two examples of particular interest for me are Frye’s comments on the style of biblical translations (modern translations, assuming a culture of rapid and silent reading, render prose in as continuous a rhythm as possible) and his attention to apocryphal Christian legends (which “fill out” incompleting schema in the canonical texts).

For Frye the seer, on the other hand, the Bible is not so much a painting to be examined from a distance as a unique vehicle or agent for expanding one’s vision. Here the Bible becomes a single “metaphor cluster” in which book, Logos, Christ, and reader are one. This shift is clearest in Frye’s treatment of the “royal metaphor”: the identification of an individual object or person with the class to which it belongs, as when a king represents the unity of society in individual form. Thus the society of Israel in the Old Testament is metaphorically identical to the individual Jesus in the New, just as the Church is the one body of Christ.

But with one imperious stroke Frye reverses the royal metaphor from what he perceives to be a potentially “totalitarian” figure of integration to a “decentralized,” democratic image in which the total body is complete within each individual. When Paul says, “Not I but Christ in me,” Frye suggests, Paul means that he is dead as what we would call an ego and that is the unity of the Logos he contains that constitutes him as individual [100–01].

It is this kind of perception, this Blakean apprehension of the world in a grain of sand, that the Bible, according to Frye, effects in its readers. As centripetal, the Bible does not point to the presence of some revelation outside itself but instead identifies itself with that presence: the Word of God is the Logos, both Christ and Scripture. And with the Apocalypse, the ultimate phase of revelation and antitype of the entire book, the reader is also invited to identify him- or herself with (and as) the Logos—to contain and become the bodies of the book, Christ, and Being itself. The restoration figured in Revelation therefore points to a timeless “new beginning” in the reader’s consciousness. Its vision of final ruin represents the destruction of the “way of seeing” that keeps us confined to time and history. Instead, with apocalyptic vision, we arise to see law, time, and history disappear and the dualisms of creature/creator, subject/object, human/divine fall away. “The apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared” [138].

The “scientific” critic, of course, also disappears because Frye’s distinctions between life and literature, centrifugal and centripetal, collapse. If this is criticism, it is what Frye in the *Anatomy* calls “anagogic” criticism. It “leads to the conception of literature existing in its own universe, no longer

commenting on life or reality, but *containing* life and reality in a system of verbal relationships” (emphasis mine).¹¹

III

One of the most consistent complaints against Frye has been that his critical program is ahistorical. Sometimes this charge means that Frye’s concern with recurring structures prevents him from adequately attending to the style and textures of individual texts. It also means that concrete historical events can appear in Frye’s universe only as the occasion for another “displacement” of an archetypal pattern. History is literary history, and in Frye’s version it has no place for discontinuity. No historical event—not the life and death of Jesus or the Holocaust—can fundamentally alter or break the archetypal form and telos of the “great dreams of the arts.”

The problem underlying these difficulties appears to be an ambiguity about the referentiality of literature and the imagination.¹² Frye’s understanding of culture as the recreation of nature seems to presuppose a real condition of alienation and necessity over which the imagination triumphs. Frye insists, for example, that literature, “sees the dimensions of the possible in the actual” [49]. “Demonic” imagery in literature in this view depicts “the world as it is before the imagination begins to work on it.”¹³ But in this same passage Frye also speaks of the demonic as the presentation of the “world that desire totally rejects.” These depictions are, in other words, archetypal or mythical patterns, expressions of negative desire, rather than representations of the world “as it is.” While tragedies may be full of gloom and catastrophe and the ineluctability of fate, Frye writes, this is only because the tragic mythos requires it; anyone who supposes that these are also characteristics of human experience is guilty of what Frye calls “existential projection.”¹⁴ In *The Great Code* the same ambiguity appears in each of Frye’s discussions of historical reference. He hints here and there that the Bible, unlike pure poetry, has an “existential concern” and that *Welthgeschichte* and *Heilsgeschichte* cannot be simply opposed to one another. But most of the time the content of the biblical writings appears to be generated by the workings of the code itself. Typology, for Frye, is not a way of interpreting historical events but entirely a “form of rhetoric.” And the “literal sense” of the Bible, in Frye’s eccentric rendering of the fourfold schema, is not the literal-historical meaning, as it was for most medieval interpreters, but simply what the words say as they “hang together” [57–62].

These ambiguities are finally resolved only by moving with Frye through the literal, allegorical, and tropological perspectives to the anagogic or apocalyptic. Here the literary universe expands to become the verbal universe. The envelope impelled by desire and shaped by archetypal forms ultimately includes within it all “creative human work”: theology, law, metaphysics, and the social sciences. From this perspective, no language is discursive or centrifugal; instead, language “contains” what it expresses. And in this view, any verbal construct can become the center of the verbal universe—a microcosm of all of civilization, and individual manifestation of the “total order of words.” The Bible, for Frye, is such a microcosm. If for Frye it is also a privileged one, it is perhaps because Frye, like a host of biblical interpreters before him, considers his own affirmations to be the high argument of the Bible itself.

The Great Code is clearly not a work of biblical scholarship, as that discipline is presently understood. But neither is it a study of “the Bible as literature,” if that phrase implies a displacement of the biblical writings from a religious context to a secular one. Frye’s volume properly belongs within the tradition of scriptural exegesis, of theological hermeneutics. To speak of Frye’s reading as a secret gospel is to note that it also belongs to the tradition of heretical exegeses. But Frye’s kerygma is not esoteric; he intends to make priests of us all. With his democratic manifesto *The Anatomy of Criticism* [sic], Frye became literary criticism’s Luther, for he aimed to place the keys to Western literary history in the hand of every serious reader. With *The Great Code*, Frye’s evangelism becomes explicit. Literature is religion, for Frye; this is the gnosis he wishes to share. Frye’s secret is universal salvation.

Notes

- 1 Northrop Frye, "Expanding Eyes," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (1973): 200.
- 2 Blake quoted in Frye, *The Great Code*, p. xvi.
- 3 Northrop Frye, *The Stubborn Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 170, 171.
- 4 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 169–170.
- 5 Northrop Frye, *Creation and Recreation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 13. *Creation and Recreation* comprises the Larkin-Stuart Lectures, delivered by Frye under the auspices of Trinity College and St. Thomas Church, January 30–February 1, 1980.
- 6 Dan Otto Via, Jr., uses Frye's *Anatomy* in *The Parables; Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).
- 7 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis; The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) (reviewed by G.W. Ahlstrom in "Aspects of the Bible as Literature," in this issue); Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy; On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
- 8 Frye, *Creation and Recreation*, pp. 6–7.
- 9 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 132.
- 10 Frye, *Creation and Recreation*, p. 73.
- 11 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 122.
- 12 Frank Lentricchia provides an astute analysis of this problem in his recent *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 2–26.
- 13 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 147.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

16. Richardson, Peter. "Cracking the Great Code, or History is Bunk." *Dalhousie Review* 63 (Autumn 1983): 400–7.

The Great Code is a towering work of imagination. It has a grand conception of the Bible, is written in a style (and with a structural consistency) that is extremely attractive, and it shows a wide knowledge of a number of fields and subspecialties.¹ As a work of imagination it has the advantages and faults of that genre. Many who do not know intimately the Bible, Biblical history, and Biblical criticism may be attracted by the very neat ways in which Northrop Frye provides an entrée into what he considers the main structures of the Biblical narrative. Those with a good knowledge of the Bible, who value its understanding of history, and who are aware of the need to approach it critically may well be distressed by *The Great Code*.

Professor Frye anticipates this negative reaction: "As a teacher I know how emotionally explosive the material I am dealing with is, and how constantly it is the anxieties of the reader that make the primary response to whatever is being said" [xx]. The book is explosive, but not always in the ways that Frye expects, as I hope to show. While he anticipates some of the intemperate reactions of the Biblical critics such as me, those reactions—a few of which I shall describe briefly—may still be important, even fundamental, criticisms of his imaginative reconstruction. Some criticisms that he does not anticipate may put his work in the category of a curious byway so far as informed study of the Bible is concerned.

It is easy enough to construct a list of things one does not like about the book. What is remarkable is the way Frye gives advance warning of these issues in the Introduction. He anticipates the difficulties he has created. Or perhaps I should say, since introductions are written last, that he was too aware of the criticisms after he had finished writing the book. But whichever way, he disarmed the critic of his lance too regularly for it to be accidental. There is here, it must be said, a quality of writing that one rarely encounters. This quality involves such an acute understanding of the subject and scope that the author hears the objections as they are being formulated by the

reader, he understands the anxieties, and he makes every effort to meet them and persuade of the truth of his view.

Let me illustrate. A marginal note to myself reads: "Frye's view of Jung's view of Blake's view of Milton's view of the Bible." But when I reread the introduction I saw that he had already told me most of that; I simply had not heard it. Likewise I became worried that he had a curious view of the causality of the Bible's origin, about which more later, only to realize that he told me he was interested in the "why?" and had claimed that "the Bible does not, for all its miscellaneous content, present the appearance of having come into existence through an improbable series of accidents" [xvii].

What follows fastens on a few substantial items of deep concern, leaving to one side those issues that I am less competent to remark upon such as the main argument of the book. The main point has to do with "the impact of the Bible on the creative imagination," or to put it the other way around, as Frye does, "how . . . the Bible had set up an imaginative framework—a mythological universe . . ." [xi]. Of the three main elements in Professor Frye's book—the content and character of the Bible, the sweep of subsequent Western literature, and a literary theory to do justice to both—I will of necessity limit myself to his remarks on the Bible.

It is important to begin with a few brief comments on the state of Biblical criticism, for Frye's basic views, despite his vast reading, seem to have remained curiously fixed at the point in the thirties when he took his own theological education. Nevertheless there are some illuminating similarities between the influences on Frye and on Biblical critics. Works on hermeneutical theory similar to those used by Frye have not only been read and appropriated by a generation of young Biblical scholars, the field has also been significantly advanced by Biblical critics.² Indeed, it is probably true to say that no body of literature has been as intensively considered by hermeneuts as the Bible. Likewise, the interest in the social sciences—in Frye's case especially comparative mythology, in German and American Biblical criticism especially sociology and anthropology—draws Frye and Biblical critics together. Again, the Biblical field in the past generation has shown a greater ability than most other literary disciplines to incorporate legitimate social science insights into the warp and woof of constructive readings of the materials.

Many Biblical scholars are as impatient as Frye is with *Formgeschichte*, that approach that deals mainly with small units of oral tradition, and the center of the stage has come to be occupied by *Redaktionsgeschichte*, an approach that looks at writings as a whole against the background of their composition processes. Frye might well still be impatient with the Redaction critics, since they deal only with single books. But he gives little evidence of knowing of this development. In the last few years, indeed, a new school of criticism has arisen, associated with the name of Brevard Childs,³ called "canon criticism," in which the concern is to take the Bible as a finished whole—as a fixed canon—and to deal with it as the Church's book. In this development Frye and Biblical criticism are moving onto the same plane, and no doubt are responding to much the same pressures for a holistic view.

In brief, Frye and modern Biblical criticism are shaped by many of the same influences; the concerns, too, are somewhat the same. As a result, I find his characterization of criticism as a "disintegrating" of the text [xvii], and his impatience with questions of authorship, historicity and so on, to be disturbing. As the investigations of those working with recent hermeneutical theory, with social scientific methods, with redaction criticism and canon criticisms have shown, the historical particularity of the Biblical materials can be taken seriously while still using techniques that encourage more relevant interpretations of the Bible than previous critical procedures. The text is not always disintegrated by modern scholars.

In fact it would seem that Frye is merely chiding Biblical scholars for not treating the Biblical material in the same way that he does. It must be candidly admitted that there is a major difference

between Frye and the mainstream of Biblical criticism. Most of us while accepting the importance, indeed the uniqueness, of the canon as it has been passed down to us, wish to insist on the historical particularity of each part of the Bible. We are not, generally speaking, willing to pay the high price required if this historical bedrock is dissolved.

This brings me to my second comment: there is an anti-historical bias in *The Great Code*. To an unashamed historian this is a very high price to pay for a literary theory. Questions of authorship, of time and place and culture and religion—even of fact—matter very much. It matters that Blake did not write *Much Ado About Nothing* and that John Milton was the writer of *Paradise Lost*. It matters how and when Mark wrote his gospel, and whether the John of the Letters is also the John of the Apocalypse. Paul's indebtedness to Judaism is important, just as Luke's apologia to Rome is. If one overlooks the particularity of the parts of the Bible, all manner of illegitimate deductions will be drawn from the Bible. This can be seen in the Pope's recent attempt to argue that Paul's statements about women to questions today about women ministers and sexual relationships. The Pope was correct when he said that Paul held some conservative views, but he was silent about Paul's more radical views. And he was quite wrong in failing to recognize that Paul's time and place had much to do with his views and our time and place have a great deal to do with our views on handling the Bible.

Frye knows all this. He grants that "no one denies that the Bible is passionately interested in historical issues," and he is correct in pointing out that "the Bible's answer . . . is a curiously quizzical one . . ." [39]. But he is not correct to conclude, as he does in his chapter on "Myth I," and "we cannot get an inch further without new archaeological evidence." This suggests an unbelievably limited view of the shape of history, as if it were concerned only for objectified data that can be dug up. Again, Frye is reflecting the simplistic views of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Most of the interesting historical work on the Bible is being done by scholars preoccupied with the history of religion, cultural developments, points of conflict in the development of early Christianity, with subtle analyses of literary forms, and with the social factors underlying the spread of Judaism and Christianity. Few would say that the "Bible will only confuse and exasperate a historian who tries to treat it as history" [42], and even fewer would imagine that archaeological evidence is the route to salvation for those who would understand the Bible sensitively and relevantly.

One aspect of what I refer to as anti-historical is more a lack of interest in history and the Bible. There is a second aspect to this, reached in the mirror chapter on "Myth II," where he collapses various historical events into *mythoi* of one and the same thing [171]. This makes good literary theory, perhaps, but it leaves me very uncomfortable, for reasons I shall mention later. It leads Frye to insist, for example, on making room in one of his diagrams for Christ's descent into Hell and the Harrowing of Hell, though as he acknowledges there is no evidence for the latter and only very weak evidence for the former. It soon becomes apparent that the literary theory, or perhaps I should say the demands created by later literary patterns, have imposed themselves upon the Bible.

In a brilliant phrase Frye refers to "the relentless smashing of individuality" of the writers' personalities in the Bible as a result of editorial processes over a lengthy period of time. Certainly there is a sense in which parts of the Bible have been pulverized by the editors. This can be seen at numerous points; in the Gospels one can certainly find a crushing of the oral tradition in the service of later purposes. Yet it must be seen that it is for other purposes and not for the homogenizing of the text. Matthew and Mark and Luke still have very strong individual peculiarities that can be described in literary terms: composition, redactional techniques, theology, attitudes to social groupings and the like. So let us rather talk about the stamp each of the editors has given the pieces

of material, and not conclude that some nameless and simple-minded editor has taken all the individuality out of the Bible and made it all of one piece.

In the Gospels or in Kings and Chronicles where the process that Frye describes can indeed be seen, however, the editors are not simple editors but writers with theological motives—even passions. In other parts of the Bible his claim is not remotely true. One must not speak of the “smashing of individuality” in Hosea or Amos or Ezekiel, or Paul or James or John. While it is true that they do not parade their personalities before us deliberately and while we do not know them as personalities as well as we might like, their personalities have in no sense been destroyed. Just barely below the surface of the text the reader discovers a Paul, alternately petulant and forgiving, or an Amos filled with righteous indignation, or a James deeply concerned for the integration of belief and behavior. Frye’s theory requires a kind of homogenization that obscures the personal idiosyncrasies and even the theological differences of the immediate authors. The reason for this is not entirely apparent. Presupposed by his theory is, however, an important view of the canon.

This canonical question is the third issue I wish to deal with. The Bible is viewed by Frye as a unified literary creation. As I have already pointed out he is uninterested in specific questions of authorship and in general issues of development. But as he proceeds he gradually begins to speak as if the Bible has taken on a life of its own. This feature crops up hesitantly in “Metaphor I,” for example, when he speaks of the verbal structure “freezing” and “turning into a unity” [72].

These “causal” notions of the Bible’s origin become a particular problem at the beginning of “Language II,” where he says: “Some aspects of this unity are clear enough, such as the care taken to indicate a beginning and an end. It would hardly be possible to start off a sacred book more logically than the opening words of Genesis do. The book of Revelation . . . was deliberately composed as a coda or finale to the whole canon” [199]. Such views presuppose, despite the later disclaimers [230, 206], a causality lying behind the Bible as a collection. This may be true. Certainly many of us who take the Bible seriously would like it to be true. But if it is true it should be historically investigated. Regrettably historical investigation does not sustain the kind of statement I have just quoted.

By using passive sentences to suggest this unity Frye hints at a mysterious process of compilation, different from what most of us really believed happened. For example, it is highly unlikely that the Gospel of John “was intended to stand first in the New Testament canon” and that “by a historical accident . . . it was the last Gospel to be admitted . . .” [207]. Both parts of the claim obscure the complicated process of composition and the real motives of the book. To begin with, the idea of a canon was not in view when the Gospel of John was written. We cannot know that it was written to stand first, although we can know that it was among the last to be considered canonical. But to claim that this was historical accident is nonsense. There were very real hesitations about the inclusion of John. Frye’s claim here is just another part of his denigrating of history and his elevation of literary need over historical fact.

Frye takes away some of the force of my objection in what follows, beginning in the very next paragraph, by noting that the Bible is also careless about its unity. Yet he continues to speak rhetorically of the Bible as if it had a self-generated origin that belies the mixed character of the whole book. Thus one finds a little later that one feature of the Bible is “its capacity for self-creation,” it has a “highly self-conscious view” of history, it creates an “awareness of itself;” we cannot “trace the Bible back to a time when it was not doing this” [225].

This kind of language is extremely confusing, especially when it is applied uniformly to all parts of the Bible. What I should want to say is that some of the authors might be conscious of some of those things. But not all. And it is unlikely that many of the Biblical authors were conscious of writing scripture. Nevertheless, as scripture the whole Bible has had the kind of effect Frye suggests upon later writers; but those effects are in the minds of the later authors. They reflect

the Church's view of the Bible and are not, as a "cause," to be attributed to some self-generated quality of the Bible itself.

My fourth concern with *The Great Code* has to do with Frye's extension of this notion of causality to include a pattern of seven "phases." There is an interpretation of the Bible called "dispensationalism," characteristic of some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forms of Protestantism and today associated only with some extremely conservative groups, usually outside the mainstream. This system too imposes a pattern of seven dispensations, sometimes linked with successive covenants upon the Biblical material. The result of such a system of interpretation as classically formulated, for example, in the Scofield Bible is to distort rather seriously the basic message of the Bible.⁴ The system takes precedence over the individual elements, especially as it seeks to find typological equivalents between dispensations and hidden meanings that will illuminate troublesome texts.

Where this dispensational scheme has been present in the Church's history there has been a strong tendency to elevate the Bible's authority and divine origin, on the other hand, while being able to discount the historical particularity of the Bible on the other. Frye's schematization has much the same effect, even though he starts from a radically different point of view. The main difference, of course, is that the basis of his system is a mythological understanding of the Bible as a whole, a notion that would make dispensationalists rise up in righteous indignation. The basic outline, the typological concerns, and the diminishing of the period of law in particular, have much in common however with this earlier attempt to deal with the Bible as a whole. Frye's view (especially in chapters 5 to 7) took me aback. It may be that he owes something to Blake or Milton on these fronts; but the consequent similarity to dispensationalism remains to a degree that is surprising.

Earlier I suggested that Frye's criticism of Biblical scholarship smacked much more of scholarship as he knew it in the thirties than of recent scholarship. This curious similarity to dispensationalism on Frye's part also seems to be a hold-over from the same period. Dispensationalism was very vigorous in the twenties and into the thirties, and exercised great (and subtle) influence on many. It is too fanciful to suggest that in this one respect Frye's system of literary theory in fact is an unconscious carry-over from his early days in the Maritimes where dispensationalism was common? Or would it be more cautious to say that early exposure to dispensationalism created fertile ground for a reading of Blake and Milton? Whichever, the consequence of cutting and snipping the Bible so that it fits into a neat seven-phase typological pattern is to remove it from reality and turn much of it into an abstraction.

Finally a brief word on two other features. I worry that Frye does not take the text seriously. I do not mean he is not serious about the Bible, but rather that he does not take the ordinary meaning of the individual texts as seriously as he should. *The Great Code* substitutes a reading of the text in general—as a mythological universe—for a reading of its constituent parts and their contingencies. I should not want to impose *my* way of reading the text upon him. But can one, in a work like the Bible, read the whole correctly without first taking the parts in their individuality and obliqueness?

My final criticism of *The Great Code* was going to be that it had a strong apologetic force, that Frye said some of the things he says in order simply to win a hearing for the Bible. This may be not a criticism but a virtue. Frye's towering position in the world of letters, his creative imagination as a literary critic, his forceful reading of the world's greatest book, and his deep commitment to his Christian roots may combine to make *The Great Code* an apologetic of great significance for the 1980s.

If this apologetic motive is present, if *The Great Code* is a deliberate attempt to turn people unfamiliar with the Bible towards Christianity, that intention could be applauded. But I am not confident that this reading is correct. The book itself sounds as if Frye believes he has actually

grasped the essential character of the Bible, not as if he is trying to make it appealing to outsiders. In the end, the intention of the author is important. This makes reading of the volume a sad experience for I suspect that Frye achieved something he did not set out to achieve, and that he failed to achieve what he thought he had.

¹ The following paper originated in a Victoria University Symposium held on October 1, 1982 to honor Northrop Frye. I am indebted to the College for inviting me to participate on that occasion and to Professor Frye for his graciousness in accepting criticism of his lifelong love affair with the Bible. The paper as delivered has been substantially revised. The title refers to Henry Ford's statement when in the witness box during a suit against the *Chicago Tribune* in July, 1919.

² See, for example, the surveys in C. E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968); Paul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (1968); Ernst Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik* (1968); Rudolph Hermann, *Bibel und Hermeneutik* (1971); James M. Robinson, *The New Hermeneutic* (1964).

³ Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). See also James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

⁴ For a positive restatement see C.C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965). For a critique, see C. B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960); and see also James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977), 190–207.

17. Wheeler, Charles. "Professor Frye and the Bible." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 82 (Spring 1983): 154-64.

In the firmament of contemporary literary criticism, no star has burned more brightly or more steadily than that of Northrop Frye. For more than three decades his keen and wintry light has shone from the north over our cultural landscape (he is a native Canadian, and though cosmopolitan in his interests has chosen to spend his professional life entirely within Canada, where he now holds the chair of University Professor at the University of Toronto). His critical position has changed no more than his residence: like Polaris, with only minor perturbations he has held fast to the spot which he claimed in 1947 with the publication of his epochal study of William Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*. Since then he has been a prolific writer and speaker (the list of titles on the flyleaf of his latest book gives a very poor indication of his output). The consistency of outlook in this *oeuvre* suggests someone who saw the truth early and has found no reason since to change his mind in any important respect.

The definitive expression of Frye's vision was *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957, a book that established his brand of "archetypal" criticism as a force to be reckoned with. But the work was far from complete at that point, for we were given to understand that Frye intended ultimately to apply himself and his characteristic theories to the criticism of the Bible, a subject that he has been interested in all along, with the implication that the ultimate usefulness of any critical system depended on how it could come to terms with this greatest literary monument of Western culture.

That book has finally arrived: *The Great Code*, subtitled *The Bible and Literature*, published in the spring of 1982 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. From its introduction we learn that it is in fact only the first volume of a projected two-volume work, the second of which is in "active preparation." This second volume is only lightly adumbrated in the first, and perhaps deliberately so, for Frye is something of a showman and may not have wanted to upstage himself. Readers finishing the first volume can find many things that Frye left himself to do, but very few that, on this evidence, he *would* do. But one should not underestimate his resourcefulness. Meanwhile, we have

here a document that is anything but tentative—a manifesto it might well be called—and since it is clearly addressed to a wider public than any of his other major works, if only because it concerns a book that millions of readers have a very personal relationship with, it deserves to be given a public critical inspection. All the more so, I must add, because few of these nonacademic readers have the background in biblical studies and literary criticism to judge its arguments properly. Those familiar with Frye's other work know his peculiar addiction to the number four and will not be surprised to meet it again here. *The Great Code* is organized as a double quaternion, with four initial chapters entitled "Language," "Myth," "Metaphor," and "Typology" reflected mirror-fashion in the following four by the same titles. In a general way the second half of the book is an application of the principles established in the first half, but theory and application are mixed throughout, and since the topics per se are important enough, we need not waste time worrying about the logic of this arrangement.

Frye's approach to the Bible begins with his version of a familiar Romantic view of language and human consciousness, according to which language has evolved over time, passing through certain specific stages which correspond to stages in the evolution of the people look at the world. The first three of these in order of time Frye calls "metaphoric," "metonymic," and "descriptive." In them language is said to move from expressing a kind of primitive integration of the self and the outside world to a state in which it reflects the clear separation of the two into subject and object, adapts itself to scientific description, and submits to the canons of truth and falsity. The fourth stage, to which he gives the label "kerygma" ("proclamation"), is a special kind, standing outside the temporal sequence, combining characteristics of the first two, and represented really by one document only: the Bible. Thus already Frye has claimed a unique status for his subject. The argument is developed with a great deal of verve and skill, but the lay reader should be warned that modern linguists would certainly regard such speculation as moonshine, if they could be got to consider it at all. Of course languages change, but does *language* change? And if so, has it regularly changed in all its manifestations at the same time and in the same direction?

On a high level of abstraction one can speak of "language" as a sort of Platonic universal and make whatever claims one wants to about it—who can tell?—but Frye wishes to combine this approach with a number of very specific claims about the status and nature of language at particular historical times, and much of his energy is devoted to preventing us from noticing the illegitimacy of this procedure. Moreover, the argument is circular, as all such arguments must be, in that language (by which Frye means vocabulary) is used as evidence of the mind behind the language which is then used to explain the language itself. The evidence, of course, is limited to written language, and the argument is further flawed by being based on the assumption of complete and exact congruence between language and thought, as was the now discredited Whorfian hypothesis.

When we move to the second chapter, on myth, we encounter a much sounder argument and many fewer technical problems, perhaps because Frye is now on his own grounds. Myths for Frye are, in a general and primary sense, all sequential structures of language; in the particular and secondary sense of myth which is his real topic they are "the stories that tell a society what is important for it to know, whether about its gods, its history, its laws, or its class structure" [33]. The Bible, then, is myth. Is it therefore not true? Frye is at great pains to dismiss the question of truth or falsity which so prejudices any discussion of myth by insisting that myths have no connection with external reality anyway: ". . . mythology is not a direct response to the natural environment; it is part of the imaginative insulation that separates us from that environment" [37]. The truth of the Bible lies in what its authors felt to be true, rather than in what actually may have been so. The Bible is story, not history. If we are tempted to applaud Frye for performing this radical and badly needed surgery which frees the study of the Bible from so much irrelevance, we should pause to

consider the price he exacts, and it is not only in the too-sweeping nature of the proclamation itself, for having made the Bible all myth he now wants to make it *one* myth, a “myth of deliverance” [50].

The third chapter, on metaphor, restates the unity of the Bible in terms of language. The Bible is full of metaphor; indeed, metaphor is “one of its controlling modes of thought” [54]; indeed, the Bible as a whole may be regarded as “a single, gigantic, complex metaphor. . . .” [63]. In Frye’s thinking these propositions lead inevitably to one another, and so he gives only the sketchiest justification for reaching this conclusion. Assuming that the Bible *is* metaphor enables him once again to separate it from the context of ordinary language, because metaphorical language is “centripetal”: it does not depend on correspondence to anything in the world outside but sends one back to language itself, and its truth is entirely a matter of “inner verbal consistency” [62]. The separation, however, is only partial, because these characteristics are shared by—and define—language in general. Here Frye has a problem that you and I do not. We are perfectly content to see the Bible as literature, but Frye cannot bear to have it submerged in any category that appears to compromise its uniqueness. Hence the subtitle of the book, *The Bible and Literature*, carefully specifies “and,” not “as.” Then what separates this complex verbal structure, this huge myth, from all works of literature that it might be confused with? For the answer we have to go back to chapter 2, to the social function of myth, which, Frye says, the Bible superbly and uniquely satisfies with its myth of deliverance. The content has come to the rescue of the form! If this is a solution at all, it is a brilliant one, for thanks to it the Bible enjoys all the immunity to attack from historians and other truth seekers that literature does, even as it escapes any taint from the rabble with which it is forced to associate on library shelves.

The topic of Frye’s fourth chapter is typology—the procedure of pairing up narrative elements (persons, places, objects, events) separated in time, on the ground that the latter member of the pair somehow echoes, fulfills, or reduplicates the former. For example, the synoptic gospels record that Jesus spent forty days fasting in the wilderness after his baptism, which is the so-called “antitype” of the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness during the exodus, the “type.” Similarly, the Sermon on the Mount for the author of Matthew was the antitype of the law which Moses received on Mt. Sinai. Scores of other examples might be given (Frye’s principal treatment of the typologies in Jesus’ career occurs later, in “Myth II”), and by no means all of them would involve the New Testament, for the Old Testament alone is rich in typologies, some of the most deliberate ones being in the book of Joshua, whose hero is clearly meant to be the antitype of Moses.

It begins to be evident, as the reader proceeds through this and later chapters, that Frye’s concept of typology is quite a broad or a loose one. Almost two-thirds of chapter 4 concerns what he calls the “royal metaphor,” or the identification of the social group with its leader, not a typological process at all by the usual definition. And the second quaternion of chapters is all subsumed under the title “The Order of Types,” though it marches us back through metaphor, myth, and language once again. How far Frye is willing to go from the standard definition of typology is his own in chapter 5, “Typology II,” where he sets up seven main phases in what he calls the dialectical sequence of biblical revelation—creation, revolution or exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse—and asserts that in this ever-broadening sequence each phase is a type of the one following it and the antitype of the one preceding it [106]. Biblical scholars will notice that, if the first two of these are collapsed into “history,” what Frye has done is nothing more than identify most of the standard biblical literary genres. His contribution to the subject, such as it is, lies in his attempt to tie them to a narrative sequence which vaguely corresponds to the actual pattern of history and makes each of the genres causally related to all the others.

The sixth chapter, which operates without much dependence on the theoretical apparatus so far erected, is a more or less conventional study of biblical imagery, concentrating upon images of water, trees, animals, food, and fire. In the seventh chapter we return to myth and are told that the

Bible has a roughly U-shaped narrative structure, “one in which man . . . loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation” [169].¹ Within this great U is a series of ups and downs which, though they seem to reflect the actual fortunes of the people of the Bible and thus to be tied to historical events, for Frye are “*mythoi*”—imaginative constructs, chapters in a narrative. Again Frye has plenty of opportunity to draw connections and, as we could have guessed, turn the many into the one (e.g.: “. . . mythically the Exodus is the only thing that really happens in the Old Testament” [171]).

The final chapter brings us back to language and to the topics of authorship and style. Frye’s strategy is first to get rid of the issue of individual authorship (a “fetish” he calls it [206]) by embracing the results of disintegrative textual criticism of the Bible, with its multiple sources and pseudonymous contributors and redactors and interpolators and scribal tinkerers. His second step is a non sequitur, but he takes it anyway: because the biblical text is heterogeneous and composite and thus cannot be easily be accounted for by modern conceptions of authorship, we may as well speak and act as if the Bible had written itself. The Bible as a whole has motives and intentions and points of view, just as if it were itself a single human consciousness.² This unity shows up in its style, which is “discontinuous and aphoristic” [219], giving it a “predominant rhythm” [211]—neither that of poetry or prose but something in between the two. The rhetoric of the Bible is oracular, as befits a book that speaks with authority.

One has to admire the *chutzpah* of a critic who can so enthusiastically give away a major point and then turn around and proceed as if nothing had happened. Frye knows as well as anyone that the Bible is a collection of disparate materials composed over many centuries and brought together by historical processes that has a good element of chance in them (where are Paul’s *other* letters?), but his antipathy to anything that seems to lessen the Bible (I mentioned above his refusal to classify it as literature) will not permit him to give any real weight to the fact of its contingency. He knows also that the Bible contains many different literary styles, but he escapes this trap by taking in the King James Version, which homogenizes its originals into that special kind of sixteenth-century English that we have learned to accept as “biblical.” This is the text that he cites throughout, though occasionally he will have to correct it as a translation. Probably of equal importance to him is the fact that the King James Version is the product of a collaborative enterprise not disfigured by the stamp of a particular author. And it too is massively *there*, a cultural monument that demands attention and respect.

And so we reach page 233. *The Great Code* does not end with a triumphant conclusion or the apocalypse that readers may feel is owed them or even with a clear summary of Frye’s position, but instead trails off with a series of verbal winks and nudges. This is not so great a fault as it would be in another book, because long before this it has been obvious that the forward motion of Frye’s exposition was illusory, and that in fact the book was devoted to a constant re-examination of the same basic data from various closely related perspectives: in short, the method of the kaleidoscope. Each shake of the machine produces a new symmetry, each symmetry as beautiful as the last, and none of them in any sense exclusive of the others. And there is always room for one more shake. Certainly Frye’s obsession with pattern-making is his most obvious characteristic as a thinker, and it appears in his writing as a kind of nervous tic that asserts itself in spite of any real need of the monument, resulting in a text that is constantly allusive, provocative, and dazzling in the richness of its content, but finally—for this reader—tiresomely exhibitionistic.

Underneath all this glitter, though, there are some very solid propositions regarding the nature and use of the Bible that the reader can identify and profitably consider. We can begin by looking at the proposition that the Bible is unique, something that Frye constantly assumes and to which he attaches great significance. No one quarrels over the facts of the situation: there is only one collection of ancient religious documents given canonical status by the Christian Church.³ But

such a collection is unique in exactly the same sense that the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Book of Mormon, the Koran, and the Rosetta Stone are unique; for none of them duplicates any other collection in the world, a fact that in itself has to be meaningless. If, on the other hand, we consider the Bible document by document, it has many parallels in ancient religious literature—histories, gospels, apocalypses, narratives, legal codes, etc.—some of which, the so-called pseudepigrapha and the New Testament apocrypha, might well have gained admittance to the biblical canon had circumstances been somewhat different. There is, of course, a way open to Frye if he wishes to take it: the Bible is unique because the Bible and only the Bible is the inspired word of God. This he will not do, but he wants to achieve the effect of the orthodox commitment of faith anyway; hence the constant posture of amazement before a text which is amazing enough, no doubt, but not *that* amazing.

Another proposition equally fundamental to Frye's position is that the Bible is a unity. Its unity is not one of "doctrinal consistency or logic" [218], but rather an imaginative unity, one created by narrative content, structure, and literary style. This is the unity that *The Great Code* is largely devoted to documenting. But let us not conclude from this massive documentation that Frye's proposition is empirically derived or even acknowledges the relevance of such kinds of evidence. For him the unity of the Bible is a premise, not a conclusion: ". . . the unity of the Bible as a whole is an assumption underlying the understanding of any part of it" [62]. It would be pointless, then, to attack him for having stacked the deck by systematically ignoring everything in the text that conflicts with his position, and to offer in rebuttal one's own list, perhaps equally long, of incoherences and disparities, because Frye is not interested in the Bible as such anyway: he is interested in the *idea* of the Bible. The Bible is what we have thought it is: "What matters is that 'the Bible' has traditionally been read as a unity, and has influenced Western imagination as a unity. It exists if only because it has been compelled to exist" [xiii]. Hence his disdain for biblical scholarship of the kind that has so enormously enriched our understanding of that text, a disdain that is, to say the least, ungracious coming from someone who knows and uses its results to the extent that he does.⁴

The book in question, I should point out in case it is not evident enough already, is the Christian Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Jews need not apply. Frye is willing to concede that the Old Testament has its own kind of integrity: ". . . from the point of view of Judaism at least, the Old Testament is much more genuinely typological without the New Testament than with it" [83], he says, without bothering to indicate how this odd generalization could be true, but his heart is not in it. He must have the whole gigantic narrative from creation to apocalypse, as a seamless unity. "Everything that happens in the Old Testament," says Frye, "is a 'type' or adumbration of something that happens in the New Testament . . ." [79], perhaps not realizing how closely he is echoing the teaching of St. Paul (see I Corinthians 10), who is in many ways the type of Northrop Frye.

I have already discussed Frye's proposition that the Bible is its own author. What needs to be added here is some consideration of what he has left out in making the claim, namely, the actual human beings who lived in specific historical times and did indeed put pen to papyrus or parchment, either composing themselves or recording and editing material composed by participants in a popular literary tradition. It is true that in most cases we do not know who these persons were, but why should their anonymity sentence them to nonexistence? They ate and slept and worried and laughed and worshipped and eventually died just as you and I must do, and the smudges of their humanity mark the biblical text in an entirely honorable and significant way. I hope I do not appear sentimental in putting it thus, but someone needs to stand up for them against those who would transform the materials of their desperately serious grappling with the most basic issues of human life into an essentially arbitrary intellectual exercise.⁵ Biblical scholars might want to characterize

what Frye has done as the abolition of the *Sitz im Leben*, the particular set of circumstances that give point to the literary effort and furnish its appropriate form. Even when an author introduces an entirely new form like the gospel, which was invented by Mark, we need constantly to be asking ourselves, if we are to understand it properly, what he thought he was doing when he wrote and what contemporary situation he was responding to. These questions are impossible in Frye's universe.

"The two testaments," says Frye, "form a double mirror, each reflecting the other but neither the world outside" [78]. That the Bible means itself goes hand in hand with the proposition that the Bible wrote itself, and both come from the dogmatic armory of the New Criticism, which a few decades ago attempted to redefine the nature of literature in such a way as to make literary works wholly objective and self-sufficient artifacts and to rule out any reference to the author as a source of intention or to the external world as a source of validation. Their truth was of an "as-if" kind, their purpose intransitive (Frye's "centripetal"). This effort in turn was only the most recent development in the ancient struggle of poets to justify their apparently frivolous activity in face of the truth-claims of religion and philosophy, and more recently of science. It is a historical irony of a high order that Frye should now have placed the Bible itself in the category of those works which were once condemned in the name of sacred truth. I am not arguing that one has to believe or not believe in the truth of the Bible; there are enormous semantic problems involved in the terms "believe" and "truth," which are more like slogans than definable concepts.

I am arguing that brushing aside *all* questions of the relations of the Bible text to the real world that produced it because *some* questions are irrelevant or unanswerable is going much too far.

It is strange that this text, which came from never mind where and was written who knows why and refers to you shouldn't ask what, can nevertheless be relevant to our lives in the reality of the present world. The Bible achieves this, Frye seems to be saying (here he is at his most delphic and elusive), not by being mimetic but by being paradigmatic. The Bible does not show us what happened in its own times, as if it were a mirror held up to the ancient world, nor does it show us any particular way what will happen in our own times, as if it were a crystal ball into which we could gaze; rather, it shows us the *type* of things that happen at all times, as if it were a great code book that enabled us to read the true meaning of the otherwise inscrutable events that surround us. And, if this is so, what do we get out of it? Perhaps mainly the realization that history is imagining us just as much as we are imagining history, and that both the world and the human mind are caught up in a perpetual cyclic dream whose content changes but whose form remains always the same.⁶ The reward of entertaining visionary concepts such as this one is a certain kind of intellectual thrill that I would be the last person to depreciate, but here we are being asked to give our assent as well as our admiration, which puts the matter on a very different footing. Whether one assents or not may in the long run depend more upon temperament or instinctive bias than anything else. I can only say that I find the vision claustrophobic rather than liberating. Or maybe it is just that I find the glitter in the eye that holds me a little unsettling.

The methods used to bring us to this point deserve some consideration of their own. Certainly *The Great Code* is a powerful book: the reader is swept along by the force of the author's style to conclusions that he may find himself helpless to resist, wondering how he got so far so fast, but enchanted nevertheless by the author's wit, energy, learning, and fluency. It is a style that I can best characterize by calling it *brisk*. Rat-tat-tat, click-click, the cards are collected, shuffled, dealt, and played, and one is astonished at how rapidly the stacks of chips have migrated to Frye's side of the table.

A good deal of the one-sidedness is achieved by a tactic that another reviewer has called "bullying."⁷ Nearly everything is stated flatly and without any qualification that would suggest doubt as to its authority; the whole spectrum from verifiable fact to wild surmise comes out looking exactly the same. One would never guess from this book that interpretation of the Bible is fraught with

difficulty and that much of it is far from being settled even at this late date. Examples could be collected almost from every page; I turn to “Metaphor II” for one of them. On the Cain and Abel story Frye has this to say:

. . . the Biblical writers tended to idealize the pastoral stage of Israelite life, in contrast to the agricultural stage, where contamination by the neighboring cults of Canaan was so frequent and so pervasive. Hence Abel’s pastoral offering to God of the sacrifice of a lamb, “not without blood” (Hebrews 9:7), was accepted, and Cain’s bloodless offering of first fruits was not [143].

(1) There is no clear evidence that there were two such separate stages in Israelite life, nor that in any case the Israelites tended to idealize the pastoral over the agricultural economy (half of the traditional Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which apparently had its own separate tradition and was merged with, not superseded by, the offering of the Passover lamb). (2) The “contamination” by the cults of Canaan, whatever that may mean, has nothing to do with any prejudice for blood offerings over grain offerings. (3) The Cain and Abel story in Genesis gives no motive or reason for the rejection of one offering and the acceptance of the other. This plain fact and notorious problem is simply swallowed up by Frye’s “Hence.” (4) It may seem captious to bring this up, but what is the quotation from Hebrews doing here? The New Testament context of this passage is a Christian exegesis of the levitical laws concerning the annual purification of the Sanctuary and the atonement for the sins of the people, and it has nothing whatever to do with Abel’s lamb. But how many of Frye’s readers are going to look the passage up to find this out and realize that they were being bullied?

And so it goes. There are no visible canons of relevance, and anything can mean anything else if only the typological or metaphorical pattern calls for it. In writing this sort of thing—and there is so much of it that only a page-by-page commentary could do it full justice—Frye is not bluffing, for he seems genuinely to believe that he holds the cards he needs. The book is not devious or dishonest. But it is thoroughly self-indulgent, the work of a writer who has had his own way for a very long time and now hardly imagines the possibility of serious opposition. One could forgive him this, as one could look upon his book as a kind of exuberant *midrash* of the archetypal-symbolic variety instead of the more conventional pious-homiletic variety, if only one could detect in it a few signs of real intellectual humility, of tolerance toward other scholars, of caution in the face of enormously difficult problems. The glibness and flippancy that mar his style are not temporary miscalculations; they are part of the very texture of Frye’s thinking.

I mentioned at the beginning that *The Great Code* is addressed to a wider public than any of Frye’s other works. Part of that public will be an academic one, the teachers and students in all kinds of courses on the Bible as literature. Since archetypal criticism of one kind or another including Frye’s is already taught in many of these halls, his book on the Bible is likely to be particularly attractive—I might say seductive—to them. Will this public understand why Frye used “and” in his title instead of “as”? Can they make out the fine print in the contract being handed them, or do they care? My nervousness may say something about my opinion of the capacities of academic departments dabbling in biblical studies, but in any case it is warranted because *The Great Code* is such an aggressive book. It is meant to overturn old habits; it very clearly wants to bring the whole public to its side.

And this public includes a much larger group than the academic one. The community of faith, Jewish and Christian. One does not have to be, oneself, a believer in order to see the danger that Frye’s approach to the Bible represents. If there were an indictable offense called “Theft of Scripture,” Frye should be before the bar of justice at this very moment, for the principal effect of

his enterprise, should it succeed, would be to deny to the faithful their own book by smuggling it away from them and fencing it to a shady outfit of myth-hunters, image-mongers, cultural primitivists, Platonists, and visionaries, whose allegiance to the religious and moral values of the Bible is exactly nil. He has stolen the Old Testament from the Jews by making Christ its hero.⁸ He has stolen the whole Bible from the Christians by abolishing it as the testament of God's purpose and the constitutive document of faith and turning it into a transcendental metaliterary vade mecum for mad metaphorists. It would be the greatest pity of all if these believers should fail to notice how fundamentally subversive to their interests *The Great Code* is, just because it has made their Bible seem so interesting and important. Come back, Robert Ingersoll—all is forgiven!

Notes

¹ We have heard of the tree of life, but, what pray, is the water of life? See Genesis 2:6: “. . . there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.” Frye admits that the Genesis account does not explicitly call this the water of life, “but symbolically that is clearly what it is” (p. 145). Oh.

² Thus he can say “It is remarkable that the Bible displays as much interest as it does in unifying its material. . .” (p. 207). “The Bible displays interest” is not entirely a figure of speech as Frye uses it. Actually, Frye has been making these assumptions about the Bible all along. For example: “The New Testament insists” (p. 78), “the intentionality of the book itself” (p. 80), and “the Bible's own point of view” (p. 92).

³ Though no Protestant sect has, so far as I know, accepted the apocrypha of the Catholic Old Testament, the Protestant Church is quite comfortable with these books and they now appear in many ecumenical editions of the Bible.

⁴ “Naturally, being the indicated and obvious way of reading the Bible, and scholars being what they are, typology is a neglected subject. . .” (p. 80).

⁵ Frye's impatience with basic issues can be gauged from his remark about “the dreary chess problem of ‘theodicy,’ of how to derive a bad world from a good God without making God responsible in any way for its badness . . .” (p. 114). So much for Job. The authenticity of the Bible as a human record has been eloquently stated by Chaim Potok, who participated in translating the third division of the scriptures, the Writings, for the Jewish Publication Society of America. See his “The Bible's Inspired Art,” *The New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 3, 1982, pp. 58-68—especially pp. 62-63.

⁶ See, for example, Jorge Luis Borges' “The Circular Ruins” and the last chorus to Shelley's *Hellas*.

⁷ J. M. Cameron in *The New York Review of Books*, April 15, 1982, p. 30. This is a very fair and perceptive review, though in my opinion overgenerous toward the book.

⁸ See pp. 174 and 178. As part of his heroic role Christ is also, as *logos*, the creator in Genesis 1-2:4 (p. 111).

18. Wiebe, Donald. “The ‘Centripetal Theology’ of *The Great Code*.” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1 (1985): 122-27.

If Frye's disclaimer is taken seriously the theologian *qua* theologian will have little interest in *The Great Code*. This book, as he put it, “is not a work of Biblical scholarship, much less [one] of theology” [xi]. It has, he insists, none of the system—historical, scientific, or metaphysical—that characterizes theology but is, rather, a work of *bricolage*, as is the Bible itself [xxi]. The “putting together of bits and pieces of whatever comes to hand,” whether in the Bible or in his book, he suggests, however, yields a deeper comprehension of reality than does abstract, scientific and rational thought. And that suggestion, his disclaimer notwithstanding, I shall argue here, indicates

that *The Great Code* is very much a theological, or at least a metatheological, exercise and that it should, therefore, be of considerable interest to theologians. Frye's acknowledgment of the "emotionally explosive" character of the thesis he presents indicates, moreover, the radical, and therefore important, nature of his (hidden) theological agenda.¹

Stated bluntly, Frye "proposes" a rejection of the traditional theological interpretation of the Bible on the ground that it constitutes a mode of thought wholly incompatible with the mythological thought forms of the Bible and substituting for it a literary-critical interpretation. Traditional theology, based as it is on the "centrifugal" language of science, constitutes "thought *about* God" and presents us with a reasoned, objective account of God neatly packaged in a system of doctrines which, however, inevitably fall prey to the superior cognitive power of the sciences.² Frye contends, therefore, that theology should "think God" and that such a theology can only emerge if, like the literary critic, the theologian conforms to the predominantly "centripetal" patterns of thought of the Bible itself, which in "thinking God" creates God. Theology, that is, should not be concerned with the extra-biblical world, physical or metaphysical, but rather with the world concerned with the meaning of human life that is created *in* the Bible, for as Frye puts it, "the Bible deliberately subordinates its referential or centrifugal meaning to its primary syntactical, centripetal meaning" [77]. The task of the theologian, therefore, is not the scientific one providing us with a proof for the existence of god or a set of cognitive claims about God but rather, like that of the literary critic, "to make us more aware of our mythological conditioning" [xxviii].

Very little of the theological agenda I have attributed to Frye can be found explicitly espoused by him. It is implicit, however, in his understanding of the nature and purpose of the "language" of the Bible as I shall now attempt to show.

According to Frye, three distinct stages characterize the development of language—the metaphorical, metonymic and demotic.³ The first is the concrete language of "the primitive mind," lacking true verbal abstraction, and is wholly free of the subject/object distinction of the latter two stages. It is poetic language; a language of feeling and expression and so a language of immediacy and immanence; a language of magic, spell and charm. Metonymic language, however, is not wholly immanent and autonomous for it involves a significant degree of conceptualization wherein words "stand for" things. The sense of identity between persons and "nature" present in metaphorical language is here replaced, to a degree, by a sense of relatedness to something not the self in a language of analogy. Metonymy, therefore, is a language of transcendence. It "parallels" metaphorical with conceptual language but it does so, Frye maintains, in such a way that the conceptual has the primary authority. What is interesting, he writes, "is that when a metaphorical tradition conflicts with the metonymic need for conceptual and moral models, it is the tradition that has to give way" [11].

Demotic language completes the move away from metaphor begun in metonymic language. It clearly distinguishes subject from object and is primarily a conceptual and descriptive language concerned with the objective world—"the order of nature" which is essentially an order of "necessity" [16]. It is the language of reason and science.

Despite the three-stage analysis Frye provides, it is obvious that he perceives in the development of language only two modes of thought, and that the two are, in a very significant sense, incompatible: "it seems to me [he writes], useful to separate both the language of immanence, which is founded on metaphor, and the language of transcendence, which is founded on metonymy in my sense, from descriptive language" [15]. He admits that each of these "modes of thought" has its own benefits and limitations but points out, nevertheless, that the growth of the latter is destructive of the former. The growth of scientific language is based on the assumption that "objective" means "real" so that "The bigger the objective world becomes, the smaller in range and significance the subjective world seems" [21]. Consequently, argues Frye, "the 'subject' is subjected

to the objective world, and not only subjected but almost crushed under it” [21]. And for Frye, the traditional language of theology in assessing the credibility of the “God-talk” to be found in the Bible in terms of the objective criteria of the “scientific universe” constitutes a mode of thought, therefore, that utterly destroys what the religious mind, a very different kind of mentation, has produced. Traditional theology, therefore, must be rejected by those who would understand the Bible, or we must jettison God-talk altogether, as Frye clearly sets out in the following passage:

In the first, or metaphorical, phase of language, the unifying element of verbal expression is the “god,” or personal nature-spirit. In the second phase the conception of a transcendent “God” moves into the center of the order of words. In the third phase the criterion of reality is the source of sense experience in the order of nature, where “God” is not to be found, and where “gods” are no longer believed in. Hence for the third phase of language the word “God” becomes “linguistically unfunctional,” except when confined to special areas outside its jurisdiction. Mythological space became separated from scientific space with the new astronomy of the seventeenth century, and mythological time from scientific time with nineteenth-century geology and biology. Both developments helped to push the conception of God out of the world of time and space, even as a hypothesis. The charge of “God-building” is a most damaging one to a third-phase writer, and the subject that used to be called natural theology does not now make much cultural impact, with the remarkable exception of Teilhard de Chardin [15, 16].

The rejection of traditional theology is not for Frye, however, the end of critical reflection on the Bible. Its demise seems to call for the creation of a new kind of theology—a theology that recognizes the literary (non-argumentative) character of the Bible, and the importance of the function of literature in recreating the metaphorical style of language suppressed by the demotic. Only a “theology” that takes on the very character of the Bible itself will do, for, as the quotation above suggests, only the “literary” can keep “God” alive since it created “God” in the first place, and it alone can “recreate.” This is clearly evident in Frye’s understanding of the Bible, (his apologetic statements regarding the title of the book notwithstanding), *as* literature—or, at least, as predominantly literary in character.

It is true that Frye claims he does not understand the Bible *as* literature but neither does he see it as non-literary—it is, he insists, “as literary as it can well be without actually being literature” [6]. Its “mode of thought,” that is, is that of literature and not that of the sciences. Consequently, even though not wholly metaphorical in style it is closer to the metaphorical than to the demotic. Like the metaphorical it is “obsessively concrete” and makes no functional use of abstraction and presents no rational argumentation [27]. Indeed, at times it appears to go against reason entirely [55, 174]. Its concern is not to present information either of the natural world or of historical events [29, 37, 41]. Nor is it thinking concerned with the causal thinking of the sciences [81, 82]. The Bible, it is true, finds itself situated in the natural world and in history, and it draws upon them, in one respect or another, in weaving its story, but, unlike science or history, owes its “allegiance” not to scientific or historical truths but rather to the spiritual truth of the “story” it contains. That “story” is not “caused” by its situation but rather is a creative and imaginative construction whose purpose it is “to draw a circumference around a human community and to look inward toward that community” [37] and so to assist it to live in its situation and to triumph over the merely natural world. The priority of meaning, then, is given to the mythical structure or outline of the story and not to its content [41], and Frye refers to this as its centripetal or poetic meaning [61]. The wisdom of the Bible is centered in human concern rather than in the exploration of the world and thus gives the Bible a focus and cohesiveness that the multiplicity of demotic concerns could not possibly

provide it [67]. Such wisdom is “knowledge” of a sort but not of nature or of history [67]; it is *vision* rather than cosmology [76], and must therefore be linked with the concepts of revelation [67] and faith [229] rather than with science. Only that reflective treatment of the Bible that recognizes all this, is then, for Frye, an adequate theology and his work here, from a literary-critical point of view, he maintains, does just that: “Traditionally, the Bible’s narrative has been regarded as ‘literally’ historical and its meaning as ‘literally’ doctrinal or didactic: the present book takes myth and metaphor to be the true literal bases” [64]. In a later, classifying passage Frye writes: “The Bible includes an immense variety of material and the unifying forces that hold it together cannot be the rigid forces of doctrinal consistency or logic, which would soon collapse under cultural stress, but the more flexible ones of imaginative unity, which is founded on metaphor” [218].

Thus far I have only looked at Frye’s metatheology—his assessment of the character and meaning of traditional theology in relationship to the Bible. His theology lies implicit in that discussion, however, even though it is not highly visible. He expresses it explicitly in pointing out that the “theology” of the Bible emerges on the basis of the “Feuerbach principle,” namely, that human persons create their gods in their own image [228]. In this sense, as Frye stated it in an interview, the Bible is “a book which has no outside” (Kaufman 4). When asked whether he thought there is a divinity (God) separate from the human imagination he, after admitting that, in theory, that possibility exists, remarked, “But that is a theory that would take me beyond human experience, and I can’t go beyond human experience” (ibid.). On further questioning as to whether this position were not itself a theory (a theology of the traditional variety?) Frye concluded: “As far as man is concerned, it seems to me, there is no reality in the conception of God outside human consciousness” (ibid.). Frye’s concern with the meaning of the “story” of the Bible, with its focus on the life of the individual and the community, rather than with extra-Biblical physical, historical, or metaphysical states of affairs, constitutes what I have referred to in the title of the essay as Frye’s “centripetal theology.” The model for that kind of theological thought, obviously, is literary criticism rather than science and metaphysics as is the past. And in this, if not in the “results” of that activity, Frye presents an important proposal for consideration by the community of traditional theologians. In a time when history and the sciences have eschewed the use of the God-hypothesis and so have given birth, as someone has put it, to “an age of the verbal placelessness of God”⁴ a “centripetal theology” that refuses to seek a meaning for God outside the language-context—the story/myth—in which it is found may be the only adequate theology to be had. It may in fact be true, that is, and paradoxically so it would seem, that only in denying the importance of the question of the extra-mythological (extra-biblical) existence of God may the reality of God be found and kept alive.⁵

Notes

¹ This assessment appears in the preface to the book and is elaborated by Frye in an interview with Andrew Kaufman, “Northrop Frye on Literature” in *The Newspaper*, 27 October 1982: 5. Frye suggests in the interview that had he written such a book in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries he would have been “burned alive.” In the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, he claims, it “would have raised a tremendous storm of irrelevant emotions” because the book sounds so uncommitted. I suspect, were his theological agenda a little less well hidden, it would do so even today.

² Frye’s assessment of the outcome in the conflict between traditional theology and science and analytical philosophy is obvious here. See, however, note 5 below.

³ Frye’s structure here seems to retain a trace of Comte’s famous stages of development in human thought—the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. It must be noted here, as well, that Frye also suggests that the Bible constitutes a fourth stage of language development, although his analysis of that stage is not all clear or persuasive. The Bible is, he says, oratorical but a peculiar form of rhetoric for which he uses the term *kerygma*. Its vehicle is myth and

therefore it is not argument nor is it concerned with information. It is different from all three of the elements that emerge in the process of language development and yet, contains all three elements—a statement that explains nothing. His justification for such empty characterization is that “the Bible is far too deeply rooted in all the resources of language for any simplistic approach to its language to be adequate” [29]. And his description of that form of discourse, which I quote at length here for the reader, leaves one in little doubt that “Kerygma” does not contain the demotic but rather stands over against it as an alien mode of thought:

The linguistic idiom of the Bible does not really coincide with any of our three phases of language, important as those phases have been in the history of its influence. It is not metaphorical like poetry, though it is full of metaphor, and is as poetic as it can well be without actually being a work of literature. It does not use the transcendent language of abstraction and analogy, and its use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout. It is really a fourth form of expression, for which I adopt the now well-established term *kerygma*, proclamation . . . *kerygma* is a mode of rhetoric [but] . . . unlike practically all other forms of rhetoric, it is not argument disguised by figuration [29].

This is not the only problem, moreover, to emerge from Frye’s discussion of the stages of language development. As my outline here will indicate, Frye, at times, seems to argue that there is a radical break between the metaphorical on the one hand and the metonymic and demotic on the other, while in other passages he maintains that the break comes between the metaphorical and metonymic over against the demotic. My discussion merely reveals that inconsistency without accounting for it since, in either event, I argue that Frye holds there to be but two modes of thought that stand opposed to one another.

⁴ Eberhard Jungel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 3.

⁵ Frye’s radical distinction between the demotic as concerned with information and knowledge and the metaphorical as concerned with meaning as if two wholly different and mutually irrelevant language games are being played is reminiscent of similar arguments regarding the nature of religious thought by philosophers under the influence of the “later” Wittgenstein. Much of Frye’s “argument” seems to parallel the debate between the cognitivist traditional theologians and the so-called “Wittgensteinian fideists,” (i.e., noncognitivists), in the philosophical literature from the late forties to the present. His suggestion that one can play both “games”—the metaphorical and the demotic—at the same time is not, however, persuasive for reasons I can only state but not elaborate here. It may be true that “the metaphorical” is not scientific (epistemic or cognitive) in intention as is “the demotic,” but it does, nevertheless, function as the only “knowledge” they—i.e., the prescientific community—had of the world in which they lived. To live in their metaphoric world would also have been to live in the only “scientific” world they had. For those who, after the rise of “the demotic,” matters are considerably more complex for now “the metaphoric” that “doubled” as “the scientific” has competition and it is not wholly clear that the “metaphorical” can subsist alone. I presume Frye’s appreciation of Ricoeur’s talk of “the second naivete” becomes operative here, but, I think, to no avail. That argument cannot, however, be taken up here.

19. Woodcock, George. “Frye’s Bible.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1982-83): 149-54.

There are advantages to writing a review that will appear several months after the book one is discussing has been published. One can assume that the latter will have been read by all those likely to be interested, and that they, like oneself, will have gone beyond first impressions to afterthoughts. That makes it unnecessary to describe what the author is trying to do; one can take it as understood and proceed to what in the long run is more important—to discuss the book in relation to its cultural context and to the author’s general body of work. The latter is particularly important when the book is a late work with a testamentary flavor—as in the case with Northrop Frye’s *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*.

True, Frye begins *The Great Code* with a typical disclaimer. “The academic aim is to see what the subject means, not to accept or reject it.” And indeed, at no point in this book does he say, or even imply, “I believe.” In this overt sense his book is not a declaration of Christian faith; the

question of faith is deliberately set aside. Yet *The Great Code* is indissolubly linked with Frye's religious background. It is the kind of book one cannot imagine a Jew or a Catholic, or even an Anglican, writing about the Bible. It comes out of the heart of the English dissenting tradition which, dispensing with liturgy, gave the Bible a centrality rivalled only in other puritan and book obsessed traditions, like Islam with its emphasis on the Koran, or Sikhism with its special reverence for another book, the Granth Sahib. Thus *The Great Code* follows naturally on Frye's celebrated studies of the two greatest poets of English dissenting Christianity, Blake and Milton.

The Great Code is partly a critical analysis of the Bible as a book that "is neither literary or non-literary, or, more positively, . . . is as literary as it can well be without actually being literature." It is partly also a study of "the impact of the Bible on the creative imagination" of the western world, an exemplification of Blake's phrase: "The Old and the New Testaments are the Great Code of Art": one senses that, though Frye's own special puritanism of the academy will not allow him to say it, he approves of the fact that Blake "went much farther than anyone else in his day in identifying religion and human creativity."

The centrality of the Bible to western culture is not so much stated as taken for granted in the *The Great Code*, and the typically Protestant failure to recognize sufficiently the other elements of western civilization gives the book from the beginning a somewhat lopsided appearance as a thesis in cultural history. For the dominant cultural role in British and German literary cultures is not paralleled in the Mediterranean Catholic cultures, where the church itself, while rejecting the pagan philosophers, sustained pagan polytheism through the transformation of the gods into saints and the myths into legends, and found the space for pagan moral attitudes while Puritanism could not allow even in disguised form. Moreover, the Reformation, which so magnified the influence of the Bible in northern Europe, was only one side of the great shift in perceptions which took place at that time on the continent. The Renaissance, which overlapped it in time, was important, not only for the rediscovery of classical writings, but also for its recognition of a continuing tradition, driven underground during the Middle Ages, that went from the pre-Socratics through Aristotle to the Arabs and thence re-entered Europe. Even for Milton—even for Blake—the Bible was only part of the code of art.

One of the most striking aspects of the Bible's role—an aspect Frye does not ignore—is that it has always stood both within and outside the cultures it so much influenced; the great majority of Christians have never read it except as the translation of a book that came into being in another time and another place and another language. At the same time it was not the only influential book that in the early seventeenth century answered this description. At the very time when the Authorized Version was being prepared, the pagan world was entering into the consciousness and the literature of England through such notable translation as Thomas North's Plutarch, which gave Shakespeare so much material and inspiration and which became one of the books often found beside the Bible and Bunyan in Protestant households. But the strange and special feature of the Bible—which makes it different even from North's Plutarch—is that as a translation it took on an intense life of its own, mainly because the Authorized Version appeared at a crucial time in the development of English prose and provided, at a time when it was needed, a striking treasury of myth and metaphor on which English literature still, though diminishingly, draws.

Yet, as we have seen, it is not the only such treasury. Indeed, many of Frye's own notations about the nature of myth which are restated in *The Great Code* derive from the grand compendium of mainly pagan lore *The Golden Bough*. More than that, one can argue, as I did in an earlier essay ("Diana's Priest in the Bush Garden: Frye and His Master" in *The World of Canadian Writing*), that the very structure of Frye's earlier masterpiece, *The Anatomy of Criticism* [sic], derived largely from what he called "the macrocosmic form" of *The Golden Bough*. That book he praised because it "makes a unified whole out of an abundance of disparate scenes and topics by an intricate set of references

backward and forward in the narrative.” And he added: “Without in the least denying the other contributory forces, we may legitimately suggest that *The Golden Bough* is also, in a very real measure, responsible for the form and shape of modern literature” (“Sir James Frazer,” in *Architects of Modern Thought*, 1959). For the present, however, Sir James Frazer and most of the “other contributory forces” are pushed into the background; Frazer is mentioned only three times in *The Great Code* and he is reproached for his rationalist weaknesses. And Frye now tells us: “In a sense all my critical work, beginning with a study of Blake published in 1947, and formulated ten years later in *Anatomy of Criticism*, has revolved around the Bible.” And he goes on to say that *The Great Code* is “among other things a restatement of the critical outlook I have been expounding in various ways for years.” And this of course is true, since all the old Frygian notions, whether they originated in his study of the Bible or in those truant years when—as he once confessed to John Ayre—“theology for me was largely Frazer’s *Golden Bough*,” certainly reappear in this complex and highly decorated edifice of a book. Indeed, they reappear with special emphasis for the excellent reason that the Bible is perhaps more suited than any other book for the application of the critical approaches for which Frye is celebrated.

Frye, of course, has always been involved in the search for a code of criticism. This is what he was trying to create in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, and in *The Great Code* he seeks to strengthen the achievement of the earlier book by basing the code, not on acknowledged works of literature, but rather on a work that by the very fact of being both more and less than literature takes one broadly into the general culture of our age—so broadly, indeed, that in one of his more curious diversions Frye is at great pains to represent Marxism as one of the many results of biblical influence. In the process he once again seeks to give criticism the kind of structure one usually encounters in non-literary areas like musical composition and the arts applied to architecture, and it is strange—but perhaps illustrative of the limitations of Frye’s sensibilities—the great biblically influenced composers like Bach and Handel and visual artists like Piero della Francesca and Michelangelo do not find the place one would have thought they deserved in *The Great Code*.

But there are more specific ways in which the Bible is an excellent subject for Frye’s kind of critical investigation. It appeals to the mythopoeic bent that was fostered in Frye by his encounter with Sir James Frazer’s books when he was a theological student. The Bible, after all, is one of the great storehouses of myth, and a lifetime absorption in it of the kind that Frye confesses can condition one to see myths and to create them when needed and to regard them as phenomena outside history. “Earlier students of myth,” says Frye, “seem to have put a strong resistance to the fact that myth is a form of imaginative and creative thinking, and therefore autonomous.” The very use of the word *fact* in this context illustrates the dogmatic tone which Frye assumes when he is talking of myth. But in fact, of course, there is a creative *process* in creative *thinking*, and that process by which myths are *made* limits their autonomy, as do the uses to which they are put, since—whatever myths may mean to later poets—to non-literate man they are as literal as history. History, however, is something that Frye seeks desperately to exclude from any critical consideration of the Bible, just as he withholds his approval from what he calls “descriptive writing,” by which one is led to assume that he means any writing that prefers history to myth and statement to symbol. Both Voltaire and George Orwell, I suspect, and probably Pope and Dryden as well, would fall into this despised category. Orwell’s “prose like a window pane” is certainly not one of Frye’s favored aims, either for other writers or in his own practice.

The Bible also suits Frye’s extraordinary lack of interest in the creative process in art—as in myth—or in the person who creates—in artists as anything other than the machines that produce works of art and otherwise can be disregarded. From this point of view the Bible is an ideal subject of criticism. There is no need to worry about individual artists, since the Bible has no identifiable authors. There is no need, either, to concern oneself with the creative process, since the Bible as we

have it is the product of secondary processes, of a collective translation (there are no disturbingly idiosyncratic individual translators like Sir Thomas Urquhart to distract our attention) based on centuries of editing, which has involved endless rewritings and rearrangings done in laudable obscurity, so that in the end the Bible is the world's greatest anonymous masterpiece and hence the ideal work—and the safest—to anatomize. All this fits well with the tendency Frye seems to have inherited with the puritan tradition, to see art in the service of religion and therefore interestingly only as the consecrated object and especially as the consecrated word. It is significant that the great individual artists when they began to emerge in the Renaissance tended to be pagan rather than biblical in their inspiration. Shakespeare—admittedly pre-AV—certainly owed more to the Tudor translations of the pagan authors than he did to the Bible. And Frye's dissenting ancestors, appearing in their most extreme form as the Roundtable soldiers who defaced the individualized images in English churches, represent a return to the essential anti-individualism of the Bible, a book in which there is not only no identifiable author but also no character who emerges as an individualized personality.

In passing, one may add that the Bible, because it is essentially an anthology of works of literature and works of no literary interest, is a book it is impossible to evaluate qualitatively, because there are no aesthetic values we can apply to it as a whole. And so it is a happy choice for a writer who has always denied the evaluative function of the critic.

Nothing in fact is changed in one's estimate of Frye by *The Great Code*. All his fascinating ingenuity is there, all his staggering sense of literary architecture, so that one admires the structure of the book even when one finds much of it debatable, much irrelevant to the real understanding of literature, and not a little obscure through an excess of cleverness. But one has the feeling that for Frye the code's the thing. Just as his earlier works were masterpieces of categorization, of explaining the mechanics of literature, so *The Great Code* admirably shows us how the Bible works. And here, I suggest, we have something different from the "academic aim" I cited from Frye at the beginning of this review: "to see what the subject means." For me *The Great Code* is not about meaning; it is about structure and mechanism. The great code is broken; we still have to read the message for ourselves, and we are not helped by Frye's assiduous efforts—in which he forgets that Clio also was one of the muses—to discourage us from recognizing how important in the Bible are its historic intent and content.

All of this, of course, is nothing new in Frye. He analyzes; he dissects; like some shamanic Frankenstein he puts it all together again in an intellectual, appealing structure. But in all this eloquent patterning and repatterning of the bones of literature the exclusive breath which is the reality of a work of art and which the artist alone blew into it is lost. As Naim Kattan remarked in his review of *The Great Code* (*Books in Canada*, June–July 1982), Frye "sometimes reduced literature to the condition of a corpse, so that he could study its anatomy." Except here and there in a fugitive way in the "Letters in Canada" reviews he used to write in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, I have never felt the sense of a book as a living entity emerging from Frye's critical writings, though those writings have their own life. There is, in all this brilliance of understanding on so many levels, an absence of empathy, which explains why Frye may confront the work, but never encounters its maker.

Certainly, in this latest, massive and impressive Frye work I have not found the Bible that has lived for me since my Anglican childhood. I understand a little more clearly how it works as a whole, why it works, but for the true breath of it, its verbal beauty and its historic power, I must return to the text. And when I catch that breath I realize, as I do with all good literature, that something more than decoding is necessary; the critic without empathy is no complete critic.

- Ages, Arnold. "In the Beginning Was the Word." *Montreal Gazette*, 13 March 1982, D8.
- Andrade, F.R.S. "A mãe de todas as histórias (*O grande código*, de N.Frye). *Folha de S.Paulo* (13 February 2005): 7. Review of the Portuguese translation.
- Atkinson, David W. "Northrop Frye: Another Landmark Work." *Lethbridge Herald*, 1 May 1982, c8.
- Ayre, John. "Distilling the Font of Literature." *Macleans* 95 (5 April 1982): 56.
- Balabán, Milan. "Zlatý klíč k Bibli a literatuře" ["The Golden Key to the Bible and Literature"]. *Literární noviny* 11, no. 15 (2000): 10. Review of the Czech translation.
- Balling, J.L. *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 47, no 1 (1984): 77–8.
- Barclay, Pat. "Northrop Frye's Awe-inspiring Look at the Bible." *Victoria Times Colonist* [BC], 19 June 1982, 34.
- Bates, Ronald. "A Literary Event of Major Scope." *London Free Press* [Ontario], 10 April 1982, 39.
- Baumgaertner, Jill P. *Christian Century* 99 (29 September 1982): 962–3.
- Bini, Benedetta. "Il mondo in una pagina." *L'Espresso* (19 October 1986): 221.
- Bliven, Naomi. "The Good Book." *New Yorker* 58 (31 May 1982): 104–6.
- Bloomfield, Morton W. "The Oldest Stories." *Partisan Review* 50 (1983): 633–4.
- Boitani, Piero. "Indicibili parole." *L'Indice* 2 (February 1987): 17–18. Review of the Italian translation.
- Booklist* (15 June 1982): 1350.
- Borgman, Paul. *Christian Scholar's Review* 12, no 4 (1983): 360–3.
- Bouce, Paul-Gabriel. *Etudes Anglaises* 37, no. 4 (1984): 449–50.
- Brauner, David. "In Man's Image." *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 7 January 1983, 13.
- Breslin, John B. "The Gospel according to Frye." *Book World* 12 (16 May 1982): 11, 14.
- Briner, Lewis A. "Divine Reading." *The Common Reader*, August–September 1982, 1.
- Bronzwaer, W. et al. "Recent Studies in Literary Theory—A Survey." *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters* 13 (1983/4): 305–6.
- Brown, Geoff. "Deciphering *The Great Code*." *Seed* [University of Toronto] 4 (January 1983): 3.
- Budd, Daniel. *Religious Humanism* 17 (Autumn 1983): 196–7.
- Burgess, Anthony. "The First Jewish Novelists." *Observer* [London], 6 June 1982, 31.
- Cahill, P. Joseph. "The Unity of the Bible." *Biblica* 65, no. 3 (1984): 404–11.
- Caird, George. "The Bible as Fiction." *London Review of Books* 4 (17 November 1982): 16–17.
- Carlisle, Thomas John. *Church Management: Clergy Journal* (August 1985).
- Carroll, Robert P. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37, no 2 (1984): 246–50.
- Cavedo, Romeo. "La superiorità della scrittura." *La Vita Cattolica* (5 October 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Cesar, Waldo. "A Bíblia sob o olhar da crítica literária." *Jornal do Brasil* (26 March 2005). Review of the Portuguese translation.
- Cialini, Giulio. "Il grande codice indica la strada maestra." *Unione Sarda* (26 July 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Conradi, Peter. "Master Myth." *New Statesman* 103 (18 June 1982): 20–1.
- Contat, Michel. "Une lecture mythologique et littéraire de la Bible." *Le Monde* (15 February 1985): 21. Review of the French translation.
- Cresti, Roberto. *Ferri* 3–4 (1987) 147–51. Review of the Italian translation.
- D'Amico, Masolino. "Bricolage biblico." *La Stampa* (21 August 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- de Hart, Steven. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19 (Fall 1986): 147–9.
- Delaney, Paul. "The Letter and the Spirit." *Saturday Night* 97 (May 1982): 55–6.
- DePinto, Basil. "The Book of Life." *America* 147 (28 August 1982): 96.

- Edinburgh, Arnold. "The Books of Spring: Three Early Bloomers." *Le Devoir*, 17 April 1982, 38.
- Eladan, Jacques. "La Bible: Code Littéraire." *Tribune Juive* [Paris] (28 June 1985). Review of the French translation.
- Erb, Peter C. *Conrad Grebel Review* 1 (Winter 1983): 57–61.
- Evans, William R. *Best Sellers* 42 (June 1982): 112.
- Fiala, Edward. "N. Frye'a zmagania z Biblią." *Przegląd Powszechny* 3 (1985): 436–46.
- Fixler, Michael. "Myth and History." *Commentary* 74 (August 1982): 76–80.
- Fulford, Robert. "Frye Holds up the Bible to Us and Says: Thought Begins Here." *Toronto Star*, 13 March 1982, F12.
- Gervais, Marty. "The Bible According to Norrie." *Windsor Star*, 27 March 1982.
- Gillespie, Gerald. "Bible Lessons: The Gospel According to Frye, Girard, Kermode, and Voeglin." *Comparative Literature* 38 (Summer 1986): 289–97.
- Gold, Joseph. "Review Essay." *English Studies in Canada* 9 (December 1983): 487–98.
- Gorlier, Claudio. "Archetipi vo cerando." *Panorama* (7 September 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Grant, George. "The Great Code." *Globe and Mail*, 27 February 1982, [Entertainment section], 17.
- Greenstein, Edward L. *Melton Journal* 16 (Spring–Summer 1983): 15, 24.
- "*El gran código*." *Mundaiž* 35 (June 1988): 134. Review of the Spanish translation.
- Hamilton, A.C. "The Bible as a Key to All Art." *Whig-Standard Magazine* [Kingston, ON], 1 May 1982, 18.
- Hammond, Gerald. *Critical Quarterly*, 25, no. 2 (1983): 5–20.
- Hellgardt, Ernst. *Germanistik* 24 (1983): 313–14.
- Helwig, Maggie. "A Big Book on *The Big Book*." *Arthur* [Trent University], April 1982.
- Hill, Edmund, O.P. *New Blackfriars* 64 (February 1983): 89–92.
- Hook, Janet. "Anatomist of Criticism Confronts a 'Huge, Sprawling, Tactless Book—the Bible.'" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 October 1982, 19–20.
- Hopkins, Dewi. "'A Glasse of Blessings.'" *Home* 37 (December 1983): 3–5, 12–14.
- Home, B[rian] L. *Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983): 432–3.
- Jarret-Kerr, Martin. "Word within a Word." *Manchester Guardian* 126 (27 June 1982): 21.
- Johnson, Pegram, III. *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 52 (March 1983): 91–3.
- Johnston, Alexandra F. *Presbyterian Record* 106 (October 1982): 32–5.
- Kattan, Nairn. "A Grand Passion." *Books in Canada* 11 (June–July 1982): 12–14. Appears also as "*La Bible selon Northrop Frye*" in *Le Devoir*, 12 June 1982, 17, 32.
- Kearney, Richard, SJ. *Studies* 72 (Summer 1983): 190–2.
- Kenner, Hugh. "Imaginative Proclamation." *New York Times Book Review* 87 (11 April 1982): 10–11, 28.
- Kermode, Frank. "The Universe of Myth." *New Republic* 186 (9 June 1982): 30–3.
- Kirss, Tiina. "*The Great Code: A Review Article*." *Crux: A Quarterly Journal of Thought and Opinion* 19 (December 1983): 18–26.
- Knelman, Judith. "*The Great Code*." *The Graduate* [University of Toronto] 9 (May–June 1982): 7–10.
- Kružík, Josef. *Tvar* 11 (2000): 23. Review of the Czech translation.
- Landon, Philip J. "Frye Finds in the Bible a Mythic, Thematic Unity." *Baltimore Sun* (4 June 1982).
- Lindon, M. "La bibbia como gran código literario." *Quimera* 51 (1986): 42–5.
- Linka, Jan. "Léčba Fryem." *Sowislosti* 1 (43) (2000). Review of the Czech translation.

- Lásias, Ricardo. "Na análise da Bíblia, um ato de liberdade contra toda barbárie." *Prosa & Verso* 9 (October 2004). Review of the Portuguese translation.
- Loudon, John. *Parabola* 7 (August 1982): 104, 106, 108.
- McConnell, Frank. *The Wilson Quarterly* 6 (Special Issue 1982): 138–9.
- McDade, John, SJ. "The Bible as Literature." *The Month* 224 [15 ns] (September 1982): 320–1.
- Magesa, L. *African Ecclesial Review* 25 (April 1983): 128.
- Manicom, David. "Frye Finds Code in Bible Language." *The Mike* [St Michael's College, University of Toronto], 16 March 1982, 8.
- Mariani, Georgio. "Metafore e miti: una lettura centripeta." *Com nuovi tempi* 14 (24 May 1987): 12. Review of the Italian translation.
- Markowski, Michal Pawel. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1988): 340–53.
- Martin, J.P. *Touchstone: Heritage and Theology in a New Age* 1 (May 1983): 42–3.
- Mauro, Walter. "Se si legge la Bibbia anche come letteratura." *Il Popolo* (20 August 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Medcalf, Stephen. "A Blakean Bible." *Listener* 108 (23 September 1982): 23.
- Medhurst, M.J. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 27, no. 2 (1991): 214–26.
- Mehnert, Gottfried. *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 18 (1985): 80–2.
- Meo, Baldo. "Li piacere della Bibbia." *Rinascita* (4 October 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Morgan, John Hanly. *Unitarian Universalist World*, 15 August 1982.
- Morley, Patricia. "Vintage Northrop Frye: Worlds out of Words." *Quill & Quire* 48 (May 1982): 35.
- Newell, A.G. *Evangelical Quarterly* 57 (April 1985): 188–9. *New York Times* 132 (5 December 1982): sect. 7, p. 30.
- Nuttall, A.D. *Modern Language Review* 78 (October 1983): 882–3.
- O'Malley, Thomas P. *America* 151 (10 November 1984): 306.
- Pachet, Pierre. "Comment lire la Bible quand on n'y croit pas." *Quinzaine littéraire* 432 (1985): 20.
- Payne, Michael. "Recent Studies in Biblical Literature." *Papers on Language and Literature* 23 (Winter 1987): 89–103 [89–90].
- Penna, Romano. "L'influenza della Bibbia sulla letteratura occidentale." *L'Osservatore Romano* (31 August 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Phillips, E. Harrell. "The Bible's Literary Framework." *Jackson Sun* [Tennessee], 15 August 1982, 5B.
- Porter, Stanley E. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (March 1984): 102–3.
- Pratt, William. *World Literature Today* 58 (Winter 1984): 172.
- Preston, Richard J. "The Spirit, the Code, and Critical Interpretation." *Culture* [Canadian Ethnology Society] 2, no. 2 (1982): 125–6. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (May 1991): 225.
- Read, Stanley. "Intellectual Giant Decodes the Bible." *Vancouver Sun*, 21 May 1982, L29.
- Ridd, Carl. *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 11, no. 4 (1982): 446–8.
- Ridolfi, Mario. "Il grande codice secondo Frye." *Unione Sarda* (20 September 1986). Review of the Italian translation.
- Robbins, Vernon K. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (August 1985): 383–6.
- Robertson, Elizabeth. "Supreme Fiction." *English* 41 (Autumn 1982): 274–81.
- Robinson, Joseph. "Bible Language." *Church Times*, 10 September 1982, 6.
- Rodd, C.S. "Talking Points from Books." *Expository Times* 94 (October 1982): 1–3.
- Rubić-Kovčević, Nela. *Godišnjak institute za književnost* [Sarajevo] 16 (1987): 330–3.
- Salzano, Giorgio. "La Bibbia come codice di metafore." *Il Tempo* (24 July 1986). Review of the Italian translation.

- Santagostini, Mario. "Da Dio al Demonio." *L'Unità* (9 July 1986). Review of the Italian translation. S[chell], R[ichard] D. *Spenser Newsletter* 13 (Fall 1982): 51–6.
- Schiller, Bill. "The Bible: An Analysis." *Windsor Star* [Ontario], 13 March 1982.
- Schindler, Marc. "Northrop Frye on Scriptural Literalism."
http://www.members.shaw.ca/jschindler/frye_1.htm
- Schott, Webster. "Bible, Codebook to Western Culture." *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland, Ohio], 17 October 1982.
- Schwab, Gweneth B. *Christianity & Literature* 33 (Fall 1983): 87–9.
- Sheehan, John F.X., SJ. "An Appreciation of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code*." *Renaissance* 3 (Spring 1983): 203–16.
- Smith, Nicholas. *Review of English Studies* 142 (May 1985), 302–3.
- Smith, R.C. *Canadian Book Review Annual, 1982*, ed. Dean Tudor and Ann Tudor (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1983), 228–9.
- Sparshott, Francis. *Philosophy and Literature* 6 (October 1982): 180–9.
- Stern, Laurent. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41 (Spring 1983): 340–3
- Stiegman, Emero. "Discovering the Bible." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1982–3): 141–9.
- Stock, R.D. *Spirituality Today* 35 (Fall 1983): 282–4.
- Stoneburner, Tony. *Anglican Theological Review* 66 (April 1984): 188–90.
- "Den store koden." <http://www.bibelbussen.no/index.php?artikel=den%20store%20koden>.
 Review of the Danish translation.
- Summerlin, Charles T. "Cracking the Code: A Review of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code*." *Lamar Journal of the Humanities* 18 (1985): 52–5.
- Swanston, Hamish F.G. "Needs Encouragement." *The Tablet* 236 (3 July 1982): 773–4.
- Szilágyi, György. "Northrop Frye: *Kettős tükrök; Az ige hatalma*." *Vigilia* 63 (April 1998). Review of the Hungarian translation.
- Takahashi, Yasunari. "The Bible and Literary Criticism." *Gakuto* 79 (September 1982): 8–11. In Japanese.
- Tóth, Sára. "És az alma narancsá lett: (Northrop Frye: *Kettős tükrök: A Biblia és az irodalom*)." *Magyar Narancs* (19 December 1996). Review of the Hungarian translation.
- Tredell, Nicholas. "Anatomy of Scripture." *PN Review* 9, no. 4 (1982): 80–1.
- Trickett, Rachel. "The Rhetoric of Revelation." *TLS*, 2 July 1982, 712.
- Turner, Darrell. "The Bible Is Also Literature." *Anchor* [Fall River, Manitoba], 8 April 1983, 8.
- Ungaro, Joan. *Village Voice* 27 (20 April 1982): 41.
- Vattamány Gyula. "Northrop Frye mint az univerzális kritika-tudomány apológétája." In *Holmi* 11, no. 1 (January 1999): 132–7.
- Wagner, Peter. *Quinquereme* 8, no. 1 (1985): 93–5.
- Watt, Bill. *The Newspost*, 18 December 1982, 6.
- Weightman, John. "The Word, with or without God?" *Times Educational Supplement*, 17 September 1982, 30.
- West, J. *Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* 44 (1983): 727–28.
- Westra, Haijo Jan. *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 21 (1986): 308–12.
- Willard, Thomas. *Arizona Quarterly* 38 (Autumn 1982): 280–3.
- Williamson, Karina. *Notes & Queries* 31 (June 1984): 288.
- Wilson, A.N. "A Little Help in Reading the Bible." *Telegraph* [London] 24 March 2008.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/anwilson/3556517/A-little-help-in-reading-the-Bible.html>
- Woodman, Ross. "From the Belly of the Whale: Frye's 'Personal Encounter.'" *Canadian*

- Poetry* 10 (Spring–Summer 1982): 124–31.
- Wurtzel, Judy. “Canadian Scholar Tries Different Interpretation.” *Richmond News Leader*, 4 August 1982, 7.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *Communication Research* 15 (June 1988): 318–38.
- Yamagata, Kazumi. *Eigo seinen* [*The Rising Generation*] 128 (December 1982): 36
- Zamora, Zedro. <http://www.centroseut.org/articulos/r1/resen002.htm>. Review of the Spanish translation.
- Zecchi, Stefano. “Le radici dell’invenzione.” *Il Giornale* (26 October 1986). Review of the Italian translation.