

*The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics*  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

*Selected reviews by W.J. Barnes, J.B. Broadbent, R. Gordon Cox, Patrick Crutwell, William Empson, Michael Fixler, Barbara Kiefer Lemalski, Isabel G. MacCaffrey, William G. Madsen, J. Max Patrick, C.A. Patrides, B. Rajan, Christopher Ricks, Joseph H. Summers, and one anonymous reviewer. Editorial additions are in square brackets.*

*Other reviews are listed at the end.*

**1. Anonymous. *Yale Review* 55 (Spring 1966): xiv, xviii.**

. . . The argument and ideas [in *The Return of Eden*] are somewhat more complex than their most recent use in undergraduate lectures at Huron College would lead one to believe, and although the book resembles both C. S. Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost* and Marjorie Nicholson's *John Milton: A Reader's Guide to His Poetry* in its appeal to "the general reader," Frye's analysis of the epics is considerably more sophisticated than theirs. To be sure, he has chastened his critical terminology, and the prose is superbly readable, even limpid; but the toughness, resiliency, and synoptic breadth of Frye's mind create an excitement sufficient to engage "the specialized reader" as well. At times, such a reader will be surprised and delighted by the clarity, as though his Trismegistus had been miraculously translated into Basic English.

Frye focuses his discussion of *Paradise Lost* through Milton's concepts of epic, created nature, man, and revolution; and his analysis of *Paradise Regained*, although not strictly a culmination of the argument, establishes similar perspectives. Beneath this structure, Frye's interpretation insists upon the *kinesis* as well as the hierarchy of Milton's world. Frye's own best insights seem generated by a sympathy with Milton's delight in life. He attributes to Milton a view of creation as "energy given form" [49]; liberty as an "inner necessity" [84-85] that is a kind of spontaneity or a "release of energy through revelation" [96]; the personalities of Adam and Eve as "explosive" [66]; and their quaint, decorous, formal address as a discovery of the resource of language, a "new and fresh form of intellectual energy" [68]. For Frye, Milton's world is exuberantly alive, but governed by the paradox that the greatest force is liberated through discipline and control, not continuous and exacerbated motion. Such a view necessarily distinguishes Classical from Christian heroism, the fruitless turbulence of Satan from the powerful serenity of Christ.

But Frye also strains his case, and the reader's allowance, when he submits terms like "lust" and "greed" to Procrustean tortures, often in the interest of a specious symmetry. An analogy is to Frye what a quibble was to Shakespeare; and although the flexibility of a mind which can find similarity in diversity is admirable, one often senses an unresisted temptation to say the merely brilliant thing. To fulfill this urge or to satisfy a tyrannous schema, "greed" is made to cover such diverse aberrations as gluttony, intemperance, jealousy, sloth, fraud, inward-turning evil, and even "the querulous desire to be left alone with [one's] pleasanter vices" [85-6]. Words which lose their integrity as words soon lose their usefulness as sergeants-at-arms.

Besides, the diminution works another way. "Greed" can be used not only too broadly, but too pointedly, and hence reductively. The effect is most noticeable in Frye's analysis of the fall of Eve. Adam's form of sin is lust. Eve's is greed. But as Frye analyzes it, Eve's greed seems to be, on the one hand, mere physical appetite, something like a craving for mangoes, and, on the other hand, a desire for separateness and individuality. Such an interpretation owes more to Plotinus, the Cabala, and

William Blake than to Milton. Frye's Eve gives no hint of the aspiration to Godhead which Milton says motivates the act; and Frye interprets "flying," in her dream of temptation in Book V, as a purely sexual image. This is not to say that he elsewhere fails to mention arrogance or pride as involved in Eve's sin; but in his analysis of the act itself the primary motive, explicit in Milton's text, quite disappears.

Frye's nominalism and blurred distinctions diminish but fortunately do not destroy the force of his analysis. The urbanity of his tone and the buoyancy of his imagination always survive the critical blindness, structural weaknesses, and other momentary disasters, and they have helped to create a book delightful to read, eloquent, tonic, at times very wrong, and always interesting.

## 2. Barnes, W.J. *Queen's Quarterly* 73 (Autumn 1966): 455–7.

. . . . The present volume. . . is an attempt to apply the grand old theory [of *Anatomy of Criticism*] to the Miltonic epics; and as such the book suffers from all the limitations which this Procrustean process induces.

Frye describes practical archetypal criticism as, in its "inductive" phase, a process of backing away, in a series of steps, from the concrete particular literary "structure" (=construct?) until "we can glimpse the archetype"—the example used is the famous grave-digging scene in *Hamlet*, which gets resolved into an archetypal "leap into and return from the grave" [*Fables* 13]. Here, as always, Frye's argument is energetic and exciting: one is *almost* overcome by the footwork. But the obvious potential danger occurring to the sobering mind is that the final step back may take us so far from the original object—work and/or author—that our view of it becomes distorted or even completely obscured. That last step may carry us over a precipice into the intense inane. Unfortunately, this is what happens in the present case. What may work in regard to Shakespeare or Blake just will not go down with regard to Milton; and anyone who has submitted himself to a careful study of Milton's general thought, of his theology, and of the traditions of religious and literary experience in which he stood will wince at the distortions of the man and consequently of the epics which appear on all too many pages of *The Return of Eden*. The clue to what generates these distortions is given, again in *Fables*, when Frye describes "the central tradition of English mythopoeic poetry" as one "in which the major and prevailing tendencies are Romantic, revolutionary, and Protestant" [1]. The second term can certainly be applied legitimately to Milton; but there are a multitude of Protestant stances; and one questions most seriously whether "Romantic" in any general and final sense can be used of Milton at all. It is the attempt to fit the poet and these two works into "the central tradition" which cause all the critical stumbling.

Here—as elsewhere—Frye's own words have a way of coming back to condemn him. In the final paragraph of *Return* he writes: "To use terms which are not Milton's but express something of his attitude, the central myth of mankind is the myth of lost identity: the goal of all reason, courage and vision is the regaining of identity. The recovery of identity is not the feeling that I am myself and not another, but the realization that there is only one man, one mind, and one world, and that the walls of partition have been broken down forever" [143].

"To use terms which are not Milton's but express something of his attitude"—that is precisely the fault of this book, especially since the "something of" often comes perilously close to being nothing at all. As for what follows in the paragraph, e.g., I am convinced that Milton would never have subscribed to more than a very small fraction of it, even supposing that he would have understood its terms. For the mature Milton would have thought it crucially important for me to know who I was as an individual over against other individuals, and what my vocation, what my historical "place," and what its possibilities, just as Spenser arranged for Redcrosse to discover his true personal identity in the

tenth canto of *The Faerie Queene*, Book I. The objects of God's providential love are particular historical personalities, not fabulous identities. That is one reason why Milton sets out to "justify the ways of God to *men*," and not in Housman's distortion, "to man." The force of Frye's paragraph would tend to make the unwary reader see Milton as some kind of Blakean mystic, which he was not.

The misrepresentations in *Return* would not be as objectionable as they are were the book addressed to sophisticated scholars, who might be expected to recognize that the distortions result from an unwarranted movement from the historical and concrete to the theoretical, schematic, and abstract; but the work is "conceived as an introduction . . . for relatively inexperienced students" and "the general reader" [vii]. What the latter may make of it may well be left to providence, but the conscientious teacher will hesitate to put the book in the hands of undergraduates without first issuing a number of stringent caveats. Moreover, anyone who is concerned about students' precision in thought and in the use of language will think twice before allowing the contaminating influence of *Return* to come within communicable range of them, for the writing is uncommonly bad. To say nothing of the instances where superficial ingenuity of statement masks semantic vacuity, the book is cluttered with individual sentences of wrenched syntax and with passages of near-incomplete incoherence. One example of each must suffice. As to bad sentence structure, consider: ". . . the angels are undergoing a spiritual education as well as Adam" [101], by no means the worst instance. As to general incoherence: "The Israelites conquer the Promised Land under Joshua, who has the same name as Jesus, corresponding to Christ's victory over death and hell, as, in the church's calendar, Easter immediately follows the commemorating of the temptation in Lent. Thus when the Angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary to call her child's name Jesus, or Joshua, the meaning is that the reign of the law is now over and the assault on the Promised Land has begun" [143]. Throughout, unless one is prepared (as with Burke on the Constitution) to venerate where one does not understand, one is moved to cry out again and again over Frye's prose: "Meaningless! High-sounding nonsense!" (or worse). The responsibility for allowing such writing to make its way into print must rest jointly with the author and with the press and its readers,

To say all this is not to deny that there are many passages in *Return* which are both brilliantly conceived and well expressed. Indeed, it falls into that class of books which, though almost totally wrong-headed in general, inevitably say many good things along the way. For the scholar and teacher long familiar with the epics and aware of Frye's perspective, these passages will stimulate worthwhile reflections. But for Frye's avowed audience one would rather recommend Helen Gardner's recently published 1962 Alexander Lectures, *A Reading of "Paradise Lost"* as an introduction much less likely to mislead the uninitiated. In addition, its prose enjoys the grace of cultured elegance.

### 3. Broadbent, J.B. *English Language Notes* 4 (March 1967): 216–18.

. . . [Frye's five] essays present a version of Milton's moral theology in the epics. Much is familiar—demonic parodies of the divine, for instance—but it is written with such delicate interestedness and occasionally points up less familiar concepts, such as "force" and "fraud," parallel to a distinction between lust and greed [72]. It is difficult, however, to be sure of the book's effect on a student audience, for various reasons, of which the most admirable is that it does not contain a single reference to any other work on Milton.

Here and there, concessions are made in the manner of C. S. Lewis—a manner usually genial and deft but sometimes only coyly indecorous: "Eve may have been a silly girl but she is still our general mother" [27]. We all lapse in this way when trying to reach an audience, but this illustrates a general tendency in the book, to stay some distance from what actually goes on in Milton's verse: surely no reader ever thought Eve was, poetically, "silly." Sometimes this leads to falsification: "Adam and

Even were suburbanites in the nude” [66]: as page 112 admits, Eden is not suburban but essentially pastoral.

In the fourth chapter particularly, there is a series of suggestions that Milton was getting at something which transcends the customary literary issues such as the unpleasantness of God in Father in Book III. Here the reader may be baffled: the replies seem not quite to follow from the charges, the transcendence to be never quite explained; though that of course is in the nature of transcendence. The main argument is that “paradise within” became central to Milton, because in the fallen state liberty can only be inward; and for him spiritual liberty, the service of God, is crucial. “Applying this principle of internalizing and spiritual discernment” to the Father, “There is nothing to be done . . . except swallow him” [110–11]. But that is exactly the reader’s difficulty. Again, “We have got far enough with *Paradise Lost* to see that we have to turn its universe inside out, with God sitting within the human soul at the centre and Satan on a remote periphery plotting against our freedom” [112]. But Milton did not write like that—he wrote an epic. “The weak spots of the poem . . . are not so well realized poetically, because what Milton wants the reader to grasp is something existential, something beyond poetry” [113]. One becomes impatient with remarks so portentous but apparently unusable. One also becomes uneasy lest one is simply too faithless, or insensitive, to understand the poetry of spirituality; it is the unease produced by evangelism.

Perhaps the difficulty does lie within Milton, though; perhaps it is the old problem of his capacity for handling myth. Both Milton and Professor Frye offer tantalizing proposals for great myths which are not completely fulfilled. One of the most interesting sections in this book refers to Milton’s conception of Arthur “as a figure like Blake’s Orc” [115], and of other figures in his occasional writings who offer “vague hints of a subterranean warrior” [106]. These hints raise another problem which has really not been solved: to what extent was Milton’s mind, however independent, and however muted by events, radical? Even—to challenge an important element in Professor Frye’s argument—to what extent was Milton’s notion of “liberty” either peculiar to himself or properly worked out in his poetry? The book ends by claiming that for Milton “the central myth of mankind” had something in it of “the myth of lost identity: the goal of all reason, courage and vision is the regaining of identity” in God [143]. One may believe that the second sentence is true; and, haunted by our search for identity, we may see traces of it in *Paradise Regained*, or *King Lear*; but surely it would be more helpful to distinguish seventeenth-century preoccupations from this characteristically modern one.

#### 4. Cox, R. Gordon. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967): 293–5.

Milton criticism may be classified in many different ways: one major division is what starts from language and verse style and that which concerns itself primarily with larger structure, doctrine, and ideas. Dr. Frye offers mainly an exposition and interpretation on this second level. This book is not, however, an exhaustive study on the scale of *Anatomy of Criticism* or the volume on Blake. . . . Here at least there is no room for the devising of large-scale systems, and the reader whose heart sinks when he comes to the invitation: “Let us visualize the dial of a clock, with the present of God where the figure 12 is. The first four figures of the dial present the four main events in the speech of Raphael” [18] may be reassured to know that three pages in the first essay are the one extended instance of this kind of thing. Nevertheless, Professor Frye’s general brilliance and ingenuity are very much in evidence. He reminds on at times of a more sophisticated C. S. Lewis with something of the same equivocal power of convincing the reader that he could produce a plausible, learned, and elegantly ingenious symbolic interpretation of almost any collection of facts or events. Occasionally there is something like Lewis’s tone: “It is difficult not to feel that the entire war in heaven is a huge practical joke to the Father, all

the more because of the seriousness with which the devils take it" [25]. But it is clear that with a slight shift of perspective this kind of thing can easily play into the hands of, say, the Empson of *Milton's God*.

As with Lewis and others, there are two basic problems. The first is to decide whether what we are given is really an exposition of Milton's intentions, or at least one that can be taken as drawing out the underlying implications of Milton's intentions, or whether it is not rather a new construction by the critic on the basis of similar materials and ideas. This problem seems to become almost explicit in a sentence like the following, where Dr. Frye is discussing Adam's exclusion from Paradise lest he should go on to eat of the tree of life and so become immortal: "God fears his doing this, not because he is jealous for his own privileges, but to prevent man from living forever in a fallen world" [81]. Are we here dealing with Milton's presentation of God or Dr. Frye's? Perhaps it would be possible to reword this sentence to suggest an implied meaning in the poem of which Milton was not fully conscious; but there are other instances, and the doubt tends to grow whether we are not being given a new tidying-up of the doctrine rather than a legitimate interpretation of the poem itself. And even if we grant that Dr. Frye's account can be fairly accepted as giving Milton's intentions, there remains the second, equally important, problem of whether these have been effectively realized and embodied in the actual work.

If on this issue Dr. Frye is less than fully convincing, it is not that he is unaware of the problems or that he falls back on the easy solution of asking us to transform ourselves into contemporary readers. At one point he says, courageously: "I am concerned with the twentieth-century reader, and for him there is no answer in what may be called the Great Historical Bromide: the assertion that such problems would not exist for the seventeenth-century reader, who could not possibly have felt such resentment against a character clearly labeled 'God' and talking like a seventeenth-century clergyman" [101]. He is as aware as Waldock that the dramatic and the conceptual aspects of *Paradise Lost* often seem to be contradictory, as especially in the treatment of the Fall of Adam, but his answer to this is that our ideas of the dramatic and heroic and indeed of what constitutes action itself are necessarily those of fallen man, and that this is precisely Milton's point. Yet such a way of saving the argument would seem to raise difficulties even more fundamental—to make the reader's appreciation in fact depend altogether upon his actually sharing Milton's beliefs, though of course Dr. Frye never say so explicitly. Something similar occurs in the discussion of Milton's presentation of God. Dr. Frye states the problem more trenchantly than many so-called anti-Miltonists: of the first speech of God the Father he says the consequences are "disastrous" and the rest of the poem "hardly recovers" from it: "whenever he opens his ambrosial mouth the sensitive reader shudders. Nowhere else in Milton is the contrast between the conceptual and the dramatic aspects of the situation . . . so grotesque" [99]—and so on for a couple of pages. But he claims to have a two-fold answer to these objections: first (as with Job) the Father's arguments are intended to discourage us from looking along a cause-effect sequence until we reach a First Cause: "at each crisis of life the important factor is not the consequences of previous actions, but the confrontation, across a gulf, with the source of deliverance" [103]. Secondly, the arbitrary sovereignty of God is a model not for society but for the inner mind of the free man, which is a dictatorship of reason obeyed by the will without argument: the distasteful dramatic aspect of the Father is that external projection of the inner sovereignty of God which produces the idolatrous tyrannies of earthly kingship. The drift of Dr. Frye's argument here can only be crudely rendered in summary, but it will be clear that its grounds are far more than merely literary. As he says: "The weak spots of the poem, such as God's speech in Book Three and Raphael's doubtful answer to Adam in Book Eight, are not so well realized poetically, because what Milton wants the reader to grasp is something existential, something beyond poetry" [113]. Agreement, that is, would seem to depend on something almost like conversion. Perhaps not many admirers of *Paradise Lost* will want to see its ultimate justification hinge on such radical personal

choices. Ought it not to be possible to go at least a reasonably substantial distance in more purely literary terms?

This brings us back to the question of style and language, of which Dr. Frye's treatment can only be described as perfunctory: Adam and Eve, we are told, use "the kind of stylized hierarchical language which indicates their exuberance in the possession of a language as a new and fresh form of intellectual energy. The formality of their speeches is verbal play" [68]. But is the stylization and formality of Adam and Eve's language distinguished so carefully, if at all, from stylization and formality elsewhere. Or again, when Dr. Frye spends two pages telling us that simplicity of language was a deep moral principle to Milton and that in theoretical and critical discussions of his prose writings he frequently advocated a plain and direct style, does he really imagine that he has made any significant contribution towards discussing the actual style and language of the epics? Even in so short a book as this there is a notable gap here.

It would not be fair to end without acknowledging that this book contains many interesting ideas thrown out incidentally which illuminate many aspects of Milton and of other literature—for instance, the brief provocative discussion of conservative and revolutionary artists at the beginning of the fourth essay. On the encyclopedic nature of *Paradise Lost*, on the total background action to which Satan's conspiracy and Adam's fall are mere foreground, on the antiheroic and antiromantic nature of the poem, on the rebel angels' sin in refusing to recognize that the Son is their own creative principle, on the abstracting quality of their minds and on the way evil throughout parodies good, on the analogy between the "symbolic Galileo" in Milton and the "symbolic Newton" of Blake [58]—on all these, and many other points Dr. Frye offers stimulating comments and insights. But it has seemed best to dwell particularly on the questions of principle which are fundamental for all critical discussion.

##### **5. Cruttwell, Patrick. "New Miltonics." *Hudson Review* 19 (Autumn 1966): 498–502.**

One of the most remarkable performances of the greatest of English critics—who is Samuel Johnson—is his examination, in the *Life* of Milton, of *Paradise Lost*. There is no better example of how to turn, with dignity and totality, an intellectual somersault. For Johnson begins with impressive praise—"a poem," he calls it, "which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance, the second place, among the productions of the human mind"—and he goes on in this style for several pages. He slides with apologetic reluctance into considering the poem's weaknesses—"for faults and defects every work of man must have"—but once he has launched on them, the conclusion is crushing. "But original deficiency cannot be supplied. The want of human interest is always felt. *Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure"—a such a verdict, from a critic who always accepted as final criterion the spontaneous pleasure of unbiased readers and who wrote elsewhere that "that book is good in vain which the reader throws away," is in fact a radical commendation.

You need not agree with Johnson: but here, as so often, he is saying what many feel more frankly than many like to say it. Which truth has of late been borne in upon me by the experience of teaching to a class of freshmen, in one of those splendid courses which take one on an impressive sweep from Homer to Camus, with Tolstoy and Cervantes in between. It would be vain to deny that poor Milton was a flop. There was a resistance to him stronger than to any of the others. Not much probing and querying were needed to bring out the source of this resistance. It lay in Milton's language—in that stranger, wonderful "epic dialect" which he invented for this one poem and which belongs to this poem alone. Neither the bigness and centrality of the story, nor the undeniable fascination of Milton's own personality, could get across the language barrier. . . . You suddenly realize

the plain fact that only a very considerable, and more than monolingual, literary sophistication is needed not merely to overcome, but positively to appreciate, the Miltonic language. You begin to wonder if that legendary Oxonian slob may not have been right when he said that the ability to appreciate *Paradise Lost* was the consummation and reward of a classical education.

Not that I would remove it from “Freshman English.” In an age and society whose education seems increasingly devoted to making people imagine that they have understood and appreciated what in fact they have not, it is probably a good thing to present them now and then with something beyond them, something they must fight with and chew at. And the poem itself is still there, alive and moving as ever. But it is there as what its author always knew it would be: as caviar to the general. “Fit audience find, though few” is what he himself expected for it, and he was essentially right. To the average reader of today it is far more inaccessible than Shakespeare or Chaucer; its huge fame and wide public in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries must have been largely due to its solemn and Biblical subject (if Milton had carried out his original intention, and chosen instead the Arthurian subject for his epic, can one imagine its appeal would have been anything like as great?)—and, I suppose, it was helped by its association with an author celebrated for his purity, Puritanism, and vast erudition in the classical languages, and high-toned religious and political sentiments. But nowadays, when Puritanism is a much dirtier word than any four-lettered one, and nobody reads the Bible, and nobody knows Latin and Greek (I am aware that my exaggerations are showing), *Paradise Lost* must be read and appreciated by a select few, for what I believe it has always been in reality: an exceedingly difficult, eccentric, and personal poem.

But still the effort is made to recruit for it an audience wider than the “fit though few” which its author looked for. And why not? One in a hundred may get the message, and that will be justification enough. Each of the two books I am now considering [*The Return of Eden* and Helen Gardner’s *A Reading of “Paradise Lost”*] was based on a series of lectures delivered to an academic audience. Frye’s *The Return of Eden* was intended “as an introduction to *Paradise Lost* for relatively inexperienced students” [vii], and Miss Gardner’s *A Reading of “Paradise Lost”* grew from her experience “in teaching and lecturing on the poem to first year undergraduates” and from her discovery of difficulties in the way. Both books, indeed, display a strong awareness of such difficulties. They may be grouped under four heads: theological, cosmological, structural, and psychological (the last named both in the character of the poem and in the personality of Milton).

The theological difficulties, as always, center on Milton’s God. Nobody, it seems, can manage to defend *him*. Frye likens him to a “smirking hypocrite,” finds his arguments “profoundly unconvincing,” and observes that “whenever he opens his ambrosial mouth the sensitive reader shudders” [99]. Miss Gardner is not quite so violent, but even she is constrained to remark on the “fundamental absurdity in making a God a theologian” and to acknowledge the “revulsion” that many readers feel at him. Neither is prepared to take the Empsonian road and argue that in fact Milton meant it—that he himself detested this God: but in that case how can one deny that one is affirming the poem to be a failure in its official objective? How can it be “justifying the ways of God to man” if it is making its readers look on him as a repulsive hypocrite—not to mention a hideous bore? Milton himself, I am very sure, would have repudiated with scorn defenders such as these; “if that is what you think of my God,” he would have said to them, “you are unworthy of my poem.” It would not have occurred to him—he was not a modest man—to blame it on his poem’s failure to do what it said it would do; but this is what has happened. Here, as in his prose, Milton is a hopeless propagandist: too much an individualist, too eccentric, ever to convince others by argument. You can sympathize with him and be moved by him, but you cannot, against your will, be made to agree with him.

The cosmological difficulties are not much noted in these books. Frye is aware of them. “Everybody,” he says, “who has ever had to comment on *Paradise Lost* has had to devote some time to its cosmology, often with some reluctance at having to incorporate what seems the lumber of defunct

science in with the living poetry” [39]. My own experience has been that such “reluctance” is entirely justified, for the universe of Milton’s poem is not constructed with the accuracy of Dante’s nor does its geography really matter to the total effect. Milton describes by suggestiveness, not literalness; his mind was essentially anti-scientific (Frye points out the “curiously deprecatory” [58] tone of his references to Galileo), and although—because he is writing a “story”—he must pretend that heaven and hell and Eden are real “places” in some spatial relationship with each other, he is not interested in the details of that relationship. They are not places for him, but conditions. Much the same (I would have thought) can be said of the structural problems of the poem. “Structural analysis” is much esteemed in contemporary criticism; a great deal of it, I have to admit, seems to me to demonstrate the ingenuity of the critic rather than the nature of the work criticized. Frye invents a clock “with the presence of God where the figure 12 is” [18] and the “nadir of the action . . . the fall of Adam and Eve” at 6 [19]. . . . I would have said that Milton was not profoundly interested in structure. He took the techniques of the Homeric-Virgilian epic—beginning in the middle, flashback narrations and future anticipations, etc.—and used them dutifully but without passion; for they had been made by storytellers for storytelling, and Milton was not a storyteller. What he was really doing was conveying a vision, and the nature of a vision is that it “happens” all at once, not in successive events as a story does. The “story” of *Paradise Lost* is in fact a nuisance to Milton, and so, therefore, is the structure which supports it.

The psychological difficulties are many and complex. They pivot around two poles, the character of Satan and his relationship to Milton’s own “rebelliousness,” and the characterization of Adam and Eve and the Fall. On the former, Frye is original but not, I feel, convincing; he suggests that “Satan is a rebel, and into Satan Milton has put all the horror and distress with which he contemplated the egocentric revolutionaries of his time” [28]—well, it is certainly true that Milton became thoroughly disillusioned with his fellow revolutionaries, but he did *not* become disillusioned with revolution. He was as firmly opposed to kingly authority after the Commonwealth had failed as he had been before it began, and Frye’s suggestion does not remove the essential difficulty, that a poet whose deepest instincts were those of a rebel should write a poem presenting rebellion as all wicked and authority as all good. Indeed, Frye himself, on a later page admits the difficulty—“what has happened to the political revolutionary in *Paradise Lost*?” [103]. It is curious to note how we are still chewing over, still trying to get round, Blake’s perception that Milton “was of the Devil’s party without knowing it”; for Miss Gardner also has trouble with Satan. She acknowledges that, as Blake had said, Milton’s imagination was “unfettered” when it dealt with Satan and hell; she recognizes that Milton presents Satan “grandly” and allows us “to admire his virtues,” but hopes to save the day by observing that all this is possible only because we know he is “doomed.” Well, perhaps: but again one wonders, as with Milton’s God, what he himself would have thought of such roundabout defenders. This is a phenomenon I am always noticing about *Paradise Lost*: its admirers seem always to be defending the poem *against itself*. (I do it myself, no doubt.) I can’t think of any other work of which this seems so consistently true.

As for Adam and Eve and the Fall, Frye is oddly self-betraying on this—or is it Milton-betraying? Anyway, he acknowledges that too many readers have found Adam and Eve unintentionally comic. This, he argues, is wrong: “the prevailing assumption had been that all this represents unconscious humour on the part of a humourless poet, and this assumption is quite wrong” [66]. But he himself is facetious about them: “Adam and Eve are suburbanites in the nude” [66], he remarks, and he describes the dialogue between the two before Eve goes off on her fatal solitary gardening in terms entirely comic—which are most surely *not* the terms on which Milton wishes it to be taken. That dialogue is meant to be loaded to the brim with tragic significance: if most readers find it impossible not to read it as quasicomic, then, once again, something is wrong, either with most readers or with the poem. Miss Gardner, I feel again, is nearer to the truth here. She perceives that Adam and Eve are presented with intense, quivering solemnity, and that what Milton is above all else concerned to say



about them is that humanity in its natural, unfallen state was not, as the libertine thinkers and Epicurean poets had said, promiscuous like the beasts, but was already united in Christian marriage. When Eve had fallen, and Adam still had the chance not to follow her, Miss Gardner honestly recognizes Milton's grim, unflinching conviction that Adam was *wrong* to eat the apple in order to stay with Eve and thereby to "fall away from his Creator for the highest human good, and spurn the Giver for the most precious of all his temporal gifts." Yes, but—once again!—this integrity of Milton's does put a fearful strain on the poem; it does make it enormously difficult for the reader's natural sympathies not to go *against* the poem instead of *with* it. For Milton has built up his picture of prelapsarian sexual joy with all the longing of a passionate and unhappily married man, and now he presents us with a God who says in effect: "I am better than that; you should have given up that for *me*." It's hard not to answer: "*You* should have given us better reason to think so."

## 6. Empson, William. "Senator Milton." *Listener* 76 (28 July 1966): 137.

It is rather surprising that Milton did not go to America at the Restoration, since that was the most likely escape from almost certain death; perhaps he thought it a duty to bear his witness till the end. Anyway, American critics often regard him as an honorary American, the patron saint of their rugged virtues; he believed that each man must fight for himself, and after all the main purpose of Eng. Lit. is to stop the kids from going Red. Professor Northrop Frye has a powerful intelligence, which told him for example that *1984* is a satire on Christianity as well as on totalitarianism—I knew this because I knew George Orwell, but to deduce it from the Structural Theory is a real achievement for the method or the man. But here he is much at ease, content to report the current Eng. Lit. folklore about *Paradise Lost*, without mentioning names as the activity is almost a communal one.

A rather curious grammar is used for such work. Improbable assertions are made plumply, and we are not advised whether Frye believes them, or Milton believed them, or Frye despised the common herd for believing them: "By refusing to understand that [the Son] is their own creative principle, by resenting or mocking this exhibition, the rebel angels are committing the sin which appears later in human history as the sin of Ham, the sin that brought so heavy a curse of servitude on Ham and his descendants"[33]. Genesis 9 does not say what Ham did when he saw the nakedness of his drunken father Noah; probably the exhibition was enough, as his two brothers, whom he warned, managed to cover father without looking. This is why all Negroes are born slaves; and, sure enough, the slave trade was getting busy in Milton's time. But does not this make him almost too much at home in America? Did the great libertarian ever write a word in favor of Negro slavery. Maybe the question ought not to be asked, but unless Professor Frye's sentence is telling us what Milton meant it seems to me pointless, and the book is largely made up of such sentences.

Feeling among friends, Professor Frye can become quite jolly about how awful God is in the poem, and what a frightful gaffe it was to let him speak. It never occurs to him that there may be something with the religion whose God is too horrible to be presented, or that Milton would have snorted at such cozy talk. The only thing to do with this God, he says, is to swallow him, that is, regard Milton's Heaven as the mental structure of a good man. But that is precisely the objection to a wicked God; his worshipers imitate him. This little dodge could never have been any real help. He is more plainly complacent when he says that "of course" we fallen men would all have chosen death to keep Eve company; that is likeable of us, though to demand a divorce at once would be the *spiritual* thing to do. It would be the action of Chaband, Heep, and Stiggins; and to say "of course" is a lie. Earlier we find him much too at home with Cleopatra (she is "obstinately likable"[26]); and he is confident that Milton, a staunch Tory, felt only "horror and distress" [28] when contemplating the revolutionaries of his time. On all topics Milton had ideals, but "it is domestic liberty that is really Milton's own sphere" [114]; education in the home, with the women and slaves under control, it is

presumed. The flavor of all this is familiar; it is the high Victorianism of about a century ago; naturally enough, as the Americans are now in a similar position.

The most interesting part of the book is about space travel. No historical figure outside the Bible gets repeated mention in *Paradise Lost* except Galileo; he would be a respected citizen in Milton's ideal state, says Frye, but the references to him are "curiously deprecatory" [58]. Milton regards him as concerned primarily with whether the stars are habitable, "as a pioneer of science fiction rather than science" [58]; and the affable Raphael gives a prolonged snub to the pride of human reason when Adam wants to know. That is, Milton was a standard Puritan, hating science and concerned only with the inner man. I think that this presumption is quite wrong. His theological position made him want to have man-like creatures on other planets, because that would be a decisive blow against the claim of any Church to be the only source of salvation. He therefore mentioned the subject whenever an angel did a bit of space travel, to keep the interest of the reader awake, though he did not pretend to know the answer. I am glad not to have to believe in the Milton of Professor Frye and his individualist herd, as he would be a nasty character.

#### **7. Fixler, Michael. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 35 (July 1966): 392–5.**

There is a pleasant sobriety in the observation Northrop Frye makes at the outset of his study of Milton's epics: "Every student of Milton has been rewarded according to his efforts and ability: the only ones who have abjectly failed with him are those who have cut him down to size—their size—and that mistake at least I will not make" [4]. In the present work . . . Frye clearly has not made that mistake; for although this is a small book it has all the imaginative magnitude we have come to expect from him. Magnitude, in fact, is the key motif in this work, as if the significances of Milton's epics were kinetic and radial, the concern being not to expose them in an arrested state, but to suggest the cultural light years they travel through and the regions they reach. The concern with their reach is justifiable. Epic poetry is, according to Frye, intrinsically encyclopedic, and above all *Paradise Lost*, as a Christian epic, symbolically deals with total knowledge. All that is past, present, and future is centered in Adam, as well as all that exists in relation to him, and what is above created existence. As elemental patterns the organization of symbolic knowledge determines Milton's epic plan from its architectural vastness down to the smallest detail. Certainly the most impressive achievement of this study is Frye's deft, often brilliant exploration of these patterns. I shall attempt a pedestrian reduction of the main ones, not in order to cut Milton, or Frye, down to size, but to suggest something of Frye's approach and the freshness with which old problems are rehandled.

The temporal pattern is essentially typological, that is to say, the main phases, which are the creation, the fall of man, the recovery of grace, and redemption, establish the basis for rhythmic repetitions. The spatial pattern is structured in terms of the framework of renaissance imagery which essentially consists, Frye tells us, of a gradation of four levels of existence; the order of grace or heaven, the human order in its unfallen state, the physical order, and the order of sin, death, and corruption. Both provide an intricate system of recurring correspondences establishing the great symmetrical patterns of anticipation and fulfillment, of action and parody. The nature of the interrelationship is sketched by Frye in his first essay by means of a model, the face of a clock whose sequence is cyclical, beginning at the top with the presence of God, proceeding immediately through the two epiphanies of the Son, and culminating in the final two epiphanies of the Son as the saving word and as the Christ of the Last Judgment. In between, on the lower half, from three o'clock to nine o'clock, is the descent into creation, the epiphany of Satan generating sin and death, and man's rise toward redemption. The scope of human action is effectively in the choice between the type of heroic angelic obedience or its inversion by the fallen angels, with Milton distinguishing as truly heroic only what is free, creative, and

therefore redemptive. Conventional heroism, exemplified by the action of the fallen angels, is not free because it is identified with nature and not nature's God. The distinction between the two, as Frye extensively suggests, is very much the point of Milton's concern with cosmology and provides the basis for the whole dialectic of image and action, of harmony and discord sustaining the great argument justifying God's ways to man. For the heart of the matter is really human freedom within the cosmos; hence, notwithstanding Galileo and the Copernican revolution, man remains at the center of creation. And insofar as man has God within him, human freedom is not determined by nature but is above it. In the created world human freedom and the object to which it aspires, the return of Eden, the presence of God, is properly found within. Thus, as manifestations of creation, the generation of the Son and the Tree of Knowledge correspond as tests of angelic and human capacities for discriminating God from what he creates; by related confusions the fallen angels and man decline to idolatry.

Frye's discussion is so sensitively attached to Milton's poems that more than any other general exposition it captures the baroque complexity these patterns manifest. But precisely because he moves in Milton's gravitational field I do not think he really solves, although he certainly puts into sharper focus, the related conceptual and artistic difficulties that have most persistently troubled readers. Frye makes the point that within the demonic order, or the order of fallen nature, time is conceived linearly as a determined sequence of events, whereas after the flood, in the order of grace within creation, time is rhythmically cyclical, the cycle representing "the elements of promise and hope" [36]. Later on, however, in attempting to mitigate (without denying) the disagreeableness of Milton's God exculpating himself from a deterministic responsibility for human sin, Frye argues that Milton places God above cyclical nature which includes time and is now said to be as much determined as is demonic linear time. One may well accept God as outside the coordinates of time and space, but if we substitute for cyclical nature the other model of the clock based on the typological rhythms of the Bible, then God is back on the dial at twelve o'clock and remains involved in the old dilemma of determinism and responsibility. Either the redemptive pattern is cyclical and history is assimilated to the overarching rhythm of renewal (which is the scriptural view of history), or the most basic of all types of human action, choice, is isolated as a perpetual encounter with the absolute and is totally irrelevant as cumulative experience. The unresolved problem is between the autonomous moment of choice and the pressure of history, and Frye, I think, overstates Milton's inclination as a revolutionary artist to discard history. Apparently, Milton's God, in the image of his maker, preferred to see human freedom as operative only in discontinuity, confronting a series of undetermined apocalyptic options. Surely to resolve just this dilemma was the whole purpose of the very elaborate Protestant doctrine of Providence which as a historian Milton repeatedly invoked. On the other hand, Frye is extremely suggestive in his illuminating restatement of the fact that Milton tended to be swayed not by the authority of the past but by the vision of the future. For according to Milton, Frye argues, reason functions as the negation of the habitual, the customary, while free choice could only be animated by what was not commonplace experience, in short, by visionary revelation. It is the vision from outside nature but within man which impels man back toward paradise. Being ultimately out of nature, like Yeats's Byzantium, paradise is something to be regained only by resisting what nature has to offer.

The myth of the return of Eden is therefore a revolutionary myth, but because Milton was concerned with ultimate precedents the myth was, Frye says, not Utopian but Arcadian. His disenchantment with politics was inevitable and *Paradise Lost* is hardly a consolation prize for the failure of the Puritan Revolution. In *Paradise Regained* the pattern is complete. Fallen nature, the wilderness, is the hell which is harrowed by the Second Adam who symbolically as the Word of God becomes for regenerate man the paradise within. However, in the seclusion of this essential action Frye sees a reminder that the garden within is at best only the penultimate stage, an expression of what he calls the central myth of mankind, the myth of lost identity. In Frye's peroration it is the transcendence of self which is the ultimate beatitude, and we are almost convinced that Milton, the least mystical of major

Christian poets, who consistently assumed the indissolubility of individual identity even within the presence of God, was more of a mystic than we ever imagined him to be. Implicit is the conviction, we are told, that “the recovery of identity is not the feeling that I am myself and not another, but the realization that there is only one man, one mind, and one world, and that the walls of partition have been broken down forever” [143]. If Milton never said this, as he never said a number of other more penetrating things which Frye elicits from his work, it is notwithstanding an advantage to have the inexhaustible evocativeness of these great epics so well demonstrated.

**8. Lewalski, Barbara Kiefer. *College English* 27 (May 1966): 643–4.**

. . . The great merit of [Frye’s] book is that it illuminates the mythic world, and therefore the structure, of Milton’s two epic poems. Professor Frye (for the benefit of his undergraduate audience) outlines yet once more Milton’s cosmology and Adam’s psychology, but his archetypal descriptions of the divine, angelic, human, and demonic orders of existence in the world of *Paradise Lost* provide a fresh perspective upon the patterns of parallelism and contrast in the poem. Some significant insights arising from that perspective are: the modulation whereby the appetites for sex and food in the angelic order and the unfallen human orders become the passions of lust and greed in the fallen order and the perversions of force and fraud in the demonic order; the recognition of the fallen angels’ gunpowder as a wholly appropriate emblem of their turning away from their true divine original to take up the “originals” of nature; the suggestion that the Father’s apparent arbitrariness in the government of heaven may be seen as constituting an education of the angels paralleling that of Adam; the contrast between the unpredictability which characterizes the human order and the mechanical repetitiveness, sometimes accompanied by stylized grandeur, which characterizes the demonic. And if, inevitably, such schematizations sometimes create distortions, these are not often so limiting as I find the contrast between Eve as “human” and Dalila as “demonic” to be when it culminates in the characterization of Dalila as “a dry, crepitating, whispering evil, audible and tangible but not visible. full of the unbearable pathos of the cast off and forsaken . . . yet never quite becoming human” [107].

A more basic limitation is that the brilliant exposition of the poem’s mythic world tends to obscure the action of the poem itself. Professor Frye’s chronological outline and description of the twelve phases of the total mythic cycle, beginning with the generation of the Son from the Father and ending with the Son’s restoration of all things to the Father, is eminently useful, yet all these phases do not have equal importance in the poem. The identification of Christ as the hero of the total cycle likewise blurs some important distinctions. While Christ in *Paradise Lost* certainly provides the ultimate pattern of Christian heroism which is to supplant the old heroic standard, surely he is not the hero-protagonist of that poem in the same sense in which he is the hero-protagonist of *Paradise Regained*. Yet Professor Frye seems to suggest that he is. To deny that Adam is the protagonist of the poem called *Paradise Lost* is to obscure the fact that the dramatic action of that poem (in contradistinction to the total Christian myth) is primarily concerned with Adam’s tragic loss, Adam’s education, Adam’s final attainment of Christian heroism through identification with the idea which the Messiah embodies. Professor Frye observes that the Incarnation and the Last Judgment are not given their “full poetic resonance” in *Paradise Lost* because “they would make the conclusion top-heavy” [118], but the more basic reason is surely that they are functioning in the *poem* (as opposed to the myth) primarily in relation to the education, the restoration of Adam.

The *Paradise Regained* essay is everywhere remarkable, illuminating in a few short pages the essential action of the poem, the symbolic meanings of the desert locale, the fundamental temptation situation as a challenge to Christ to determine how and when to supersede the Law. The conclusion, presenting *Paradise Regained* as a recension of the “central myth of mankind . . . the myth of lost

identity” [143], provides a highly suggestive dimension for contemplating the poem’s enduring meaning.

### 9. MacCaffrey, Isabel G. *Modern Language Quarterly* 27 (Dec. 1966): 477–80.

Orwell’s injunction that all saints should be judged guilty until proved innocent is one that the common reader would willingly apply to literary critics, criticism being in his view as eccentric a vocation as sainthood, and as serious a threat to everyday experience. Among those who have shown us why critics must be listened to, Northrop Frye occupies a commanding, perhaps a preeminent position—and attracts, as a result, a particularly attentive and questioning scrutiny. Works of literature, being taciturn and opaque, challenge our understanding and, as Erich Auerbach says of the Bible, demand exegesis, which must concentrate precisely on the unspoken, or tacitly spoken, meanings. Criticism involves, therefore, the study of tacit expressiveness, or form in the widest sense; and to this task all of Frye’s books devote themselves. This one on Milton is a microcosm, answering a great many of the incidental demands legitimately made upon the critic, illustrating some of the roadblocks that often obstruct his progress, and suggesting, it must be confessed, some of the reasons why we are impatient or suspicious of criticism.

Since, as Frye has said elsewhere, the literary imagination swallows the world, as readers we are all inside the whale’s belly and must define our position with reference to the container, not the “content.” It is fitting, therefore, that the first of the four lectures on *Paradise Lost* should analyze the poem’s structure, relating it brilliantly to other encyclopedic forms and lighting up separate sections by observing their affinity with lesser genres—masque, sermon, Socratic dialogue, educational treatise. In the fourth lecture, too, form is the central concern, but Frye comes it obliquely, considering how the unique imagination of Milton the Protestant revolutionary shaped his poem. Entitled “The Garden Within,” the chapter deals with the indwelling of God in the soul, as the controlling thematic and structural principle of the epic, as well as of Milton’s writings on liberty. If his conclusions are not unprecedented, they are offered with great freshness and subtlety. As often in reading Frye, we learn from the critical procedure, which here involves the use of “biographical evidence” in a compellingly original context.

The two central lectures undertake to unravel the knottiest problem which any teacher of Milton can confront: how to provide his listeners with the basic information they must have before they can enter *Paradise Lost*. This information is mainly doctrinal (Chapter II deals with cosmology, Chapter III with hierarchy and its relation to sin); the poem’s “content” must, therefore, be dealt with, and the question of how we can talk about it least misleadingly becomes acute. Frye’s theoretical solution is familiar to his persistent readers. He suggests that there exists, gradually developed in the Western imagination, a recurrently reshaped, stylized, or “archetypal” content available to all writers and congruent with a tradition of literary conventions. There are thus twin structures attracting critics’ attention—of forms and of “ideas”; but insofar as the first has swallowed the second, making it incarnate in specific literary works, we are really talking about the same thing, whichever structure we choose to focus on.

This theory is attractive and even, probably, true; but it raises difficulties in a book like *The Return of Eden*, which its author conceives “as an introduction . . . for relatively inexperienced students” [vii]. The critic, when he is offering information, may sound as though he is speaking of “content” alone: he protects himself against the fallacies of this procedure by working consciously within his theoretical framework, but the inexperienced student may have no such safeguard. Writing for such an audience becomes, then, an exercise in the tactful choice of vocabulary. One can find in this book examples of more and less satisfactory choices. Take, for instance, two comments on the

disappearance of Paradise in Book XI. In the first, Frye speaks of the “two levels of nature, a physical one and a human one”: “*As far as man is concerned . . . the entire order of nature is now a fallen order. The washing away of the Garden of Eden in the flood symbolizes the fact that the two levels of nature cannot both exist in space, but must succeed one another in time, and that the upper level of human nature can be lived only as an inner state of mind, not as an outward environment*” [41]. The second passage appears in a discussion of the poem’s imagery: “But if Eden disappears as an outward environment, it revives as an inner state of mind, the ‘Paradise within thee, happier far than Michael promises Adam. One of the first things that Satan is compared to in the poem is the leviathan who looks like an island, but who would be likely to disappear into the water and drown the unlucky fisherman who landed on him. Eden disappears in the same way, but not so deceitfully. It is no good looking for Paradise anywhere on earth, but there is a garden inside the human mind, walled up and guarded by angels still, yet a place that the Word of God can open” [54–5].

One could cavil at “in the same way” in the second quotation; but the passage as a whole is marvelously perceptive, reminding us of that action at a distance that knits *Paradise Lost* together, and making us think of Milton’s care in drawing distinctions as well as parallels. Frye is here “interpreting” the poem’s doctrinal implications in language that does minimum damage to the imagination’s modes, because the comment remains congruent with the structure of imagining in *Paradise Lost* itself. In the first passage, on the other hand, the phrase “symbolizes the fact that” alerts us to the presence of dangerous weapons. In his remarks on time and space, Frye is placing the poetic action in a theoretical context that has both literary and doctrinal relevance, but we should be careful not to suggest to students that Milton *says* anything of the sort. The quotation illustrates how readily a conceptual system, though originally derived from the formal structures expressed in specific works, may, once devised and mastered, devour its parents and take on a life of its own, offering a set of terms into which individual instances can be translated. The passage on the “symbolism” of Milton’s action is a translation; that on the interaction of images, an interpretation. There should be no question of which we ought more readily to offer the “inexperienced student” as a model.

Nevertheless, informed readers of Milton will find the passage—and, indeed, the whole of these two lectures—as suggestive as it is dangerous. Frye performs this sort of schematization extremely well. His commentary is the product of creative intellectual action, working at a level somewhere between the poem’s concrete imagining and the philosopher’s reductive abstraction. For example: “The symbolic Galileo in Milton thus resembles the later symbolic Newton in Blake: he stands for a philosophical vision that, in Marx’s famous phrase, thinks it more important to study the world than to change it. . . . The Galileo vision in Milton sees man as a spectator of a theatrical nature, and such a vision is opposed to the vision of human liberty. It is not idolatrous in itself, but the demonic basis of it is. The vision of liberty pulls away from the world and attaches itself to a total human body within, the Word that reveals the Eden in the redeemable human soul, and so releases the power that leads to a new heaven and a new earth” [58–9]. It is a magnificent paragraph. The commentary has, precisely, the integrity and internal consistency of biblical exegesis. It obviously grows out of a carefully developed theoretical vision, owing much to Blake, large-minded, human, and balanced. As a product of a magisterial intelligence, it cannot fail to command our attention and, much of the time, our assent. Such discourse is legitimate critical activity, insofar as the critic is more than merely “practical,” dealing with *ad hoc* elucidation of obscurities. Insofar as he is a theoretician, he must attempt to locate his discipline among other inventions of the human mind, and that means discovering (and employing) a system of intertranslatable terms. Yet this must be accomplished without losing the feeling for his own subject’s uniqueness, i.e., its untranslatability.

The problem of how to keep these two principles in balance in a pedagogical context has not been completely solved yet, even by Frye. Theoretical criticism is the last infirmity of noble minds, and cannot be offered for imitation to the immature and the ignoble. Behind Frye’s practice of criticism in

*The Return of Eden* lies an exact sense of what he is doing and a total mastery of the poem. He is possessed by it; but in speaking to those not yet so possessed, perhaps never to be so, he risks losing them to the poor, loveless, ever-anxious crowd of pseudocritics who want to reduce literature to terms they can feel comfortable with. When we undertake to translate, we expose our failures of taste, our shallowness and vulgarity, if those be our characteristics. In the hands of a master, translation becomes itself an art, as we all know, and provided we realize that we are not reading the original, we can derive profit and delight from Chapters II and III of this book. Their freshness can be described in terms Frye uses to speak of *Paradise Lost* itself, of Milton's power to transform "the dreariest commonplace" into an art that is "like the commonplace, and yet so different, the simplicity that keeps us at the centre of human experience" [117].

#### 10. Madsen, William G. *Criticism* 8 (Fall 1966): 389–94.

Professor Frye's latest book consists of four public lectures on *Paradise Lost*, plus a revised version of a paper on *Paradise Regained*. . . . The paper on *Paradise Regained* is a classic, and I will say no more about it except that I liked it better in its original version. The public lectures "were conceived as an introduction to *Paradise Lost* for relatively inexperienced students with the hope that they would also have something to interest the general reader" [vii]. They were a "distillation of undergraduate lecture notes," but they have "grown more complicated" [vii] as they were rewritten for publication. Thus disarmed, the reviewer is at a loss how to proceed. Shall he judge the book merely as a series of witty, urbane, and learned public lectures, or shall he take the hint by the reference to greater complexity and judge it by the standards that any book written by one of our most influential critics would seem to demand? If I were to take the first alternative, I would have to say that although as public lectures they are superb, as an introduction to *Paradise Lost* for undergraduates they will not do. Frye says a great many right things about Milton and *Paradise Lost* and life in general, and no one would think of denying that he has earned the right to say these things, but he ought not to offer them to undergraduates on a silver platter. They should be shown how to earn them too, and this can be done only by rubbing their noses in the text, not by backing away from it as Frye by his example encourages them to do. The kind of engagement with the text that undergraduates ought to emulate may be seen in Louis L. Martz's *The Paradise Within*, a book that deals with Frye's central theme, the internalization of Eden. The contrast in method would provide a topic of discussion in a course in literary criticism.

It is, however, the second alternative I wish to pursue, but before discussing his central theme I should like to comment on some unfortunate aspects of his method as they are revealed in this book. Frye appears to be the victim of his theory that you cannot teach literature, you can only teach criticism, and that criticism and direct experience of literature are two different things. Direct experience, he says, is like seeing colors; criticism is like physics. The well-known aberrations of the history of taste are the result of "the attempt to bring the direct experience of literature into the structure of criticism" [*Anatomy* 28]. If we accept Frye's general theory of criticism, we begin to wonder, in his words, "if we cannot see literature, not only as complicating itself in time, but as spread out in conceptual space from some kind of center that criticism could locate" [*Anatomy* 17]. (The spatial analogy is central to all of Frye's work, and in this respect the *Anatomy* may be regarded as one of the last great monuments of the Ramistic mind.) The result, as it seems to me anyway, is a kind of literary firmament divided into "houses" of tragedy, comedy, satire, etc. in which the stars tend to look pretty much alike, though some shine more brightly than others.

Frye begins by taking the long view of the orb of *Paradise Lost* "Through Optic Glass," and we are not surprised that he manages to assimilate the poem, or parts of it, to *Le Sepmaine*, the *Zodiac of Life*, *The Faerie Queene*, the Bible, the Puritan sermon, the Platonic dialogue, the description of an ideal

commonwealth, the treatise on the education of a prince, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* (broken down into a quest followed by a romantic comedy), tragedy (with Nature, sighing through all her works, occupying the place of the chorus), and the Jonsonian masque (Hell as antimasque followed by the “splendid vision of ordered glory” in Heaven). Some of the analogies are brilliant, some are merely commonplace, but one is tempted to paraphrase Dr. Johnson on Donne: “Who but Frye would have thought the first three books of *Paradise Lost* are a Jonsonian masque?”

When he moves a little closer to the poem Frye's passion for schematic diagrams betrays him into some curious distortions. He asks us to “visualize the dial of a clock” [18] (notice the spatialization of time) as an aid to seeing the “formal symmetry” of the total action of the poem. At the figure 12 is the presence of God. The “main events” of the poem may then be distributed around the clock as follows:

1. First epiphany of Christ: generation of Son from Father.
2. Second epiphany of Christ: triumph after three-day conflict.
3. Establishment of natural order in the creation.
4. Establishment of the human order: creation of Adam and Eve.
5. Epiphany of Satan, generating Sin and Death.
6. Fall of the human order. [At the bottom of the clock, naturally.]
7. Fall of the natural order: triumph of Sin and Death.
8. Re-establishment of the natural order at the end of the flood.
9. Re-establishment of the human order with the giving of the law.
10. Third epiphany of Christ: the Word as gospel.
11. Fourth epiphany of Christ: the apocalypse or Last Judgment. [20–1]

The first four events are narrated in the speech of Raphael, the last four in the speech of Michael. The last four, Frye says, “correspond to the four that we found in the speech of Raphael, but they are in roughly the reverse order” [19]. Now “roughly” is a word that calls attention to itself in a very unmannerly way in the polite world of these smooth correspondences. And if we look a little more closely at these two sets of four events, we shall see that what “roughly” means is that they are not in reverse order at all. Frye saw that 8, which ought to correspond to 4, really corresponds to 3, and that 9, which ought to correspond to 3, really corresponds to 4. What he did not see, apparently, is that 11, which ought to correspond to 1, really corresponds to 2, as anyone who has studied the symbolism of Christ's triumph knows.

Taking another look at the clock, we notice that Frye has no time for what most students of Milton would regard as the crucial event of the poem: the reconciliation of Adam and Eve with God, an event that is signaled by the almost word-for-word repetition of seven lines at the end of Book X. There seems nothing to do but place it at about 7:30 and try to save the appearances by suggesting that it corresponds, roughly, to Satan's failure to be reconciled, which we must place at 5:30 even though strict symmetry would demand that it fall at 4:30.

We get more schematics in the second chapter, where we learn that there are four *orders* of existence in *Paradise Lost* which correspond “with some modifications” [39], to the traditional medieval and Renaissance four levels of existence. Let us spread these on the page:

<i>Orders</i>	<i>Levels</i>
Divine	Grace (presence of God)
Angelic	Proper human order—Eden
Human	Physical order—fallen man
Demonic	Sin and death and corruption



I am not sure I have got this right. On page 21 Frye flatly says: “There are four orders of existence in *Paradise Lost*, the divine order, the angelic order, the human order and the demonic order.” So far so good, except that if he is going to distinguish between good angels (angelic order) and bad angels (demonic order), he ought to make room for two human orders also. Then on page 39 we hear of the traditional four *levels* of existence, except in describing them Frye unaccountably refers to them as *orders*: “There is, in the first place, the order of grace or heaven . . . Below this is the proper human order.” On page 40 they become levels again, and what we had thought was going to be an illuminating distinction between orders (prelapsarian?) and levels (postlapsarian?) becomes something of a muddle.

These examples betray not only a haziness of thought and expression but also (and more profoundly) a failure to realize that *Paradise Lost* does not possess the kind of symmetry Frye attributes to it. (What kind it does possess I shall suggest in a moment.) Formal symmetry is simply not one of Milton’s values; anyone who doubts this should read Chapter III of Joseph Summers’ *The Muse’s Method*.

In the *Anatomy* Frye says that a “direct experience” is “central to criticism yet forever excluded from it.” One cannot help wondering what his direct experience of *Paradise Lost*, which one would have thought to be as rich and exciting as that of anyone imaginable, is really like. Perhaps we get more than a hint in his discussion of the Fall. We must have the passage before us:

At the same time, Adam is motivated by his desire to live with Eve and his feeling that he cannot live without her. Conceptually and theologically, he is entirely wrong, and we have explained [!] how he should have “divorced” Eve at the moment of her fall. But again, the conceptual and theological situation is not the dramatic one. Adam’s decision to die with Eve rather than live without her impresses us, in our fallen state, as a heroic decision. We feel a certain nobility in what Adam does: Eve also feels this and expresses it. When Adam falls, he falls, as Milton says, “Against his better knowledge, not deceived,” but he also attracts some sympathy from the reader who feels that if Adam had actually gone back to God accusing Eve of mortal sin and demanding to be released from his contract with her he would have forfeited that sympathy. The reader feels that, whether or not this is the right thing for Adam to do, this is what he himself might well have done if he had been in Adam’s place. And that, of course, is exactly Milton’s point”[79].

Passing over the incredible arrogance of “explained” (how could a man who loves his wife as much as Adam loved Eve demand a divorce simply because she has committed a mortal sin?), we note the prim, mincing quality of this passage. *In our fallen state* we feel a *certain* nobility in what Adam does; he attracts *some* sympathy; the reader feels that this is what he himself *might well* have done. There is so much pussyfooting here that for a moment I was not sure whether “this” in the next to the last sentence referred to eating the apple or asking God for a divorce. The scene is a profoundly ambiguous one, of course, but the ambiguities cannot be resolved into a conflict between the “theological” situation and the “dramatic” one. In the dramatic situation Adam knows (and we know) that he is doing the wrong thing, but he feels (and we feel) that he cannot do anything else. Theologically Adam is confronted by a genuine dilemma. On the one hand he knows he ought not to disobey God; on the other hand, he knows that he is responsible for Eve and cannot abandon her. And he is simply ignorant of any other theologically acceptable course of action. Even if Frye had been there to explain the situation to him, it is not likely that the notion of asking God for a divorce would have had much appeal. Someone (perhaps it was C. S. Lewis) has suggested that Adam should have asked God to forgive Eve. This is an excellent idea, but of course it could only come from a

fallen man. Adam had no knowledge of forgiveness, and who will blame him for not having had imagination enough to think of it?

The central theme of this book is the return of Eden, the “Paradise within” the mind of man who enjoys the “totality of freedom and intelligence which is God in man” [31]. There is a “garden inside the human mind, walled up and guarded by angels still, yet a place that the Word of God can open” [55], the Word having earlier been defined as the power by which God moves downward toward his creatures [50]. Again, “The vision of liberty pulls away from the world and attaches itself to the total human body within, the Word that reveals the Eden in the redeemable human soul, and so releases the power that leads to a new heaven and a new earth” [59].

At first I thought the preposition in Frye’s title was significant—the return *of* Eden, not the return *to* Eden—but a close reading suggests that this is not true. He recognizes of course that Milton did not envisage any kind of return to a visible Paradise: “The washing away of the Garden of Eden in the flood symbolizes the fact that the two levels of nature [the “proper human” and the “physical,” the second and third of his levels of existence] cannot both exist in space, but must succeed one another in time, and that the upper level of human nature can be lived in only as an inner state of mind, not as an outward environment” [41]. There is “nothing divine in space that man can *now* see, nothing to afford him a model of the new world he must construct within himself” [58]. Even in the Garden it was Adam’s duty to “concentrate on the Word of God within him and not on the works of God outside him” [56]. Nor is there any question of a political Utopia: the “goal of man’s quest for liberty is individualization: there is not social model or ideal state in the human mind” [114].

Not every Miltonist will agree that these are profoundly Miltonic statements, but I certainly think they are, and I am grateful to Frye for saying them. On the other hand, he is not as clear about all this as he might be. More than once he speaks of the paradisiac state of mind as an imaginative return *to* Eden: “Every act of the free intelligence, including the poetic intelligence, is an attempt to return to Eden, a world in the human form of a garden, where we may wander as we please but cannot lose our way” [31]. “The world we fell from we can return to only by attaining the kind of freedom to which all education, as Milton defines it, leads, and it is this freedom that is said by Michael to be a happier paradise than that of the original garden” [110]. The vision of liberty in the unfallen world, he says, is more especially a vision of domestic liberty. Civil and religious liberty is the concern of dialecticians, but “domestic liberty, the goal of human development itself, takes us from dialectic to the emblematic vision or parable, and requires a poet” [115].

This idea of Eden as an emblematic vision is central to Frye’s whole conception of *Paradise Lost*, and it is surprising that he does not develop it at more length. Speaking of the threefold structure of reason, will, and appetite in the human soul, he says that reason is subordinate to a higher principle, which is revelation. “The point at which revelation impinges on reason is the point at which discursive understanding begins to be intuitive: the point of the emblematic vision or parable, which is the normal unit in the teaching of Jesus” [74]. The story of the fall of Satan is a parable to Adam, he says, and apparently the story of the Garden is a parable to us. Man can achieve salvation only by “knocking down his idols,” as Samson did, and then waiting for a “genuinely new vision,” which “can only come from something inside us which is also something totally different from us. That something is ultimately revelation, and the kernel of revelation is Paradise, the feeling that man’s home is not in this world, but in another world (though occupying the same time and space) that makes more human sense” [97]. And if we contemplate the emblematic vision as Milton did, we shall get “a glimpse of a central point of order which absorbs both hope and disillusionment into serenity” [117], and we shall realize that “the pattern established for man on earth by God was not social but individual, and not a city but a garden” [114].

This view of the centrality of the Garden is a popular one today, though it has not often been stated so eloquently and persuasively. I can only say that I think it is wrong because it omits the figure

of Christ, and Blakean statements about “the total human body within, the Word that reveals the Eden in the redeemable human soul” [59], the “world in the human form of a garden” [31], and “the realization that there is only one man, one mind, and one world” [143] . . . do not rectify the omission. If it is formal symmetry we are looking for in *Paradise Lost*, the nearest approach to it is provided by the image of Christ, which radiates from the exact center of the poem. His role of Judge of the rebel angels at the end of Book VI, which is a foreshadowing of his role at the Last Judgment, is assumed again in Book X when he judges man, and his role as Creator at the beginning of Book VII is anticipated in Book III where he is revealed as man’s Intercessor and recreator. In Books I and II his absence is the most terrible of his judgments, and in Books XI and XII his presence in human history, at first in “shadowy types” and then in truth, is the most glorious of his mercies. It is only by contemplating Christ that man can make the moral ascent to God which, as Frye says, has replaced the physical ascent mentioned by Raphael. . . . We cannot return to Eden, and the return of Eden can only be accomplished by the creative, metaphoric power of the Word, who is Christ. . . .

### 11. Patrick, J. Max. *Seventeenth-Century News* 24 (Spring 1966): 1–2.

These essays . . . are undoubtedly fascinating, stimulating, even dazzling virtuoso performances characterized by illuminating insights (such as the emphasis on the encyclopedia aspect of the epic). Those neophytes who are exposed to them will emerge believing that they enjoy *Paradise Lost* and perhaps able to understand it better than they would otherwise.

On the other hand, we wonder what the unsophisticates’ reactions will be to Frye’s simplistic, overconfident, quarter-truth, generic pairings: “the colloquy of Raphael and Adam is a Socratic dialogue without irony, a symposium with unfermented wine, a description of an ideal commonwealth ending with the expulsion of undesirables, and (for Adam is king of men) a cyropedia, or manual of royal discipline” [12]. “We should also realize the extent to which the dramatic form of the Jonsonian masque has formed these first three books” of *Paradise Lost* [18].

Happily, the neophytes will hardly understand these notions: it suffices for such beginners that such boldly expressed notions sound good. For the learned, these glib equatings have the shock value of suggesting new perspectives and approaches. And it certainly is a relief not to be exposed to the cautious hesitations of orthodox scholarship. If Frye goes to the extreme of grossly oversimplified notional statement, it is still better than what Professor Qualifier would write—“It is perhaps possible to see some affinity, even some significant slight similarity between the conversation of Raphael and Adam—or at least some parts of it—and the Socratic dialogue (without its irony, of course), though we hasten to add that this approach to partial likeness does not seem to exist between *all* the Socratic dialogues and the angel-man interview but does, in some measure, occur in the *Symposium*.”

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the sequence of brief questions and long answers provided by Adam and Raphael is rather far removed from Socratic dialogue, and Frye’s identifying them may be more misleading than constructive. The form is probably closer to one of those didactic question-and-answer sessions between unsocratic masters and pupils which occur in primers and other textbooks. Or, instead of alleging that Milton thus incorporates into *Paradise Lost* the versifying of a major prose genre, Frye might as plausibly suggest that Milton was weaving into the epic a versified equivalent of the Anglican catechism. The similarity between Milton’s rather sparse description of the Kingdom of Heaven and the ideal commonwealth described by Plato, Iambulus, and Euhemerus is so dangerously slight as to be more confusing than illuminating. No doubt Frye’s ingenuity is equal to making such a paralleling significant, but he fails to provide the detailed illumination needed.

I have an uneasy suspicion that Frye subconsciously feels that he could have taught Milton a thing or two, and that *Paradise Lost* is a somewhat imperfect realization of what might have been done

with all that celestial cycle. At any rate, Frye finds in *Paradise Lost* “a kind of formal symmetry” [18] which might not be expected in a baroque work. Indeed, “the formal symmetry can be carried much further” [18]. So he schematizes “the total action” [18] by visualizing a clockface with God at high noon [and eleven other stages of the action]. . . . Frye works all this out with matchings, correspondences, nadir and zenith, etc.; and one’s marvelling at Milton’s virtuosity grows—until one realizes that this tremendous schematization is not his at all: it is a dialling system that he *could* have employed, that he *may* have considered; but this is Frye’s *Paradise Lost*, not Milton’s. Conceivably a great epic could be composed in twelve books corresponding to the points on the clockface. But as Frye himself recognizes, “Some of the divisions take up several books and others only a few lines” [18]. In blunt words, Milton did not use this pattern. But Frye is too fond of his horology to admit as much: so he adds, “but that is of no importance. Most of the shorter ones are from the Bible, and Milton expected his reader to be able to give them their due importance” [18]. In other words, Milton failed to make explicit the pattern of his total action, but Frye *feels* that we must assume it. The reader has the burden of being the poem’s architect. We have heard of “creative criticism”; but now every peruser of *Paradise Lost* must be his own *creative reader!* This is quite a load for those neophytes to bear: but they now have Frye. And one must admit that, in a sense, *Frye does more than Milton can to justify Pea Ell to man.*

But I do not intend to damn the volume: it is most readable, brilliant in treating the dialectic whereby evil parodies good throughout the epic, informative about why Gabriel does not answer Adam’s query if other celestial bodies are inhabited, and helpful in reminding readers that the authority of the Miltonic husband over his wife is “spiritual authority only” (“A bullying or dictatorial attitude towards one’s wife would be merely one more example of what Milton calls man’s effeminate slackness”[63]). Some of the incidental comments are most perceptive: thus, commenting on Milton’s doctrine of divorce, Frye succinctly states, “The man has the right to divorce his wife (or the wife the husband) if she is a threat to his spiritual integrity, and she cannot be that without representing something of what idolatry means to Milton. When Eve, after her fall, comes to Adam and urges him to fall with her, that is the point at which Adam should have ‘divorced’ Eve, hence the argument for divorce comes into the very act of the fall itself” [65].

A selected few passages will have to serve to illustrate other excellent aspects of these stimulating essays: “*Paradise Lost* is a poem with no relish of damnation in it” [82]. The revolutionary aspect of Milton also comes out in that curious mania for doing everything himself which lead him to produce his own treatise on theology, his own national history, his own dictionary and grammar, his own art of logic” [91]. “The fact that liberty for Milton is always essentially verbal liberty, the power to know and utter, means that liberty for him has a specific focus which is not strictly that of either thought or action” [95]. The theme of the externalizing of the demonic and the internalizing of the divine runs through every aspect of Milton’s writing” [109].

We do not recommend this book to its intended audience of neophytes and general readers; but we do recommend it warmly to sophisticated Miltonists.

## 12. Patrides, C.A. *Review of English Studies* 18 (August 1967): 330–2.

In 1648 Obadiah Howe commenced his treatise *The Vniversalist Examined and Convicted* with a protest. “The infirmity of crowding to the Presse,” he wrote, “is growne Epidemicall. Infirmity I call it; because from thence men doe (*Publice insanire*) and have this unhappinesse, that, in the Apostles phrase, their madnesse is knowne to all men, 2 *Tom.* 3. 9. And Epidemicall I call it: for who though of the meanest of the people, but may fill his hand and the Presse at pleasure.”

The relevance of this complaint to our own predicament as students of Milton! Hence our relief at turning to Professor Mr. Frye's *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, well aware as we are that his studies to date constitute a harmonious whole. But the Preface warns us that these essays are notes on a lower key than the author's other compositions. . . . The lectures were originally conceived as "an introduction to *Paradise Lost* for relatively inexperienced readers," and even now simply "a distillation of undergraduate lecture notes" [vii].

So much for "the Warning Voice." But in fact the reader obtains one of the finest introductions to *Paradise Lost*, written in a felicitous and lucid style that enhances the reasoned nature of the matter and opens our minds to fresh paths down which we may further explore it to our enrichment. This modest volume is what it says it is: an introduction. It is for us to expand our own knowledge of its many concepts and ideas which the specialist will recognize as already the topics of exhaustive discussion by other critics. Of course, Mr. Frye has not added a new dimension to the dialogue now in progress concerning, for instance, Milton's conception of heroism or the dialectic of the last two books of *Paradise Lost*. On the other hand, the reiteration of the familiar deserves to be commended because it issues from a critic with an unerring ability to distinguish the essential from the inessential and phrase it forcefully, even memorably.

Thus the discussion of Milton's view of woman's subordinate status includes the fundamental tenet that "A bullying or dictatorial attitude towards one's wife would be merely one more example of what Milton calls man's effeminate slackness" [63]. Again, the extensive observations on the double standard by which action is judged in *Paradise Lost*—a thesis in tune with the argument of Milton Miller in *The University of Toronto Quarterly* for 1951—involve a series of salutary reminders such as that "The admiring description of the size of Satan's spear and shield in Book One has two perspectives: from man's point of view Satan is incalculably strong, but from God's point of view he is only a lubber fiend" [25]. Similarly, Mr. Frye's awareness of the much-rehearsed topic of appearance and reality in *Paradise Lost* starts with the premise that the real situation is very often the opposite of the dramatic one, advances to the idea that he who possesses a genuine power of action can rightly afford to abstain from pseudo-activity, pauses to demonstrate this by glancing at the situation in *Comus*, and concludes: "Satan, who seems so lively and resourceful, is the power that moves toward the cessation of all activity, a kind of personal entropy that transforms all energy into a heat-death" [22–3].

Each of Mr. Frye's essays revolves about one specific theme. The first essay deals with the encyclopedia nature of *Paradise Lost*; the second, with its fundamental view of evil as a parody of good; the third, with implications of the soul's division into reason, will, and appetite; the fourth, with Milton's conception of liberty; and the fifth, with the typology of *Paradise Regained*. Mr. Frye connects these diverse topics through his cohering view of the two epics and through the numerous links he establishes between his various chapters. His overall view is directly involved with his justified obsession to demonstrate the "formal symmetry," the "vast symmetrical pattern" of the major epic—and as an indispensable supplement to this, the vision that informs *Paradise Lost* no less than *Paradise Regained*. He employs for his links exposition of the divine parodied by the demotic, discussion of Milton's view of false heroism in both epics, the theory that both Adam in his colloquy with Raphael and the angels during the exaltation of the Son of God undergo a spiritual education. He also contrasts repeatedly the dramatic and the conceptual aspects of the situations in the two poems. Mr. Frye's hints to us are of no less importance since they include notes on the association of punning with a sinful nature, on the "stylized hierarchic language" [68] of Adam and Eve, on the "semantic sanity" [115] that distinguishes Milton's writings, and on the relationship between the emblematic technique of *Paradise Lost* and the parabolic teaching of the New Testament. His endeavor to justify Milton's garrulous God is particularly fascinating.

The sweet reasonableness that distinguishes Mr. Frye's essays is on occasion displaced by a surprising though calculated vehemence. He denies rousingly that Adam and Eve are "insipid" [66]

characters. He attacks spiritedly “the ignorant and perverse” who continue to regard Milton’s style as “oppressively brocaded and ornate, a kind of Anglicized Latin, sonorous and lofty but never direct and simple” [115]. The reader, however, is most impressed on the whole by the serene graciousness with which matter is wedded to manner. This achievement merits praise because so much criticism of Milton suffers from lean thought or emaciated style—or both. But should the initiate having studied Mr. Frye’s essays turn thereafter to Professor Joseph H. Summers’s *The Muse’s Method* (1962)—which I dare be known to think the best single study of *Paradise Lost* published in our time—we may well begin to eliminate the jarring noises still emanating from many untuned instruments. . . .

**13. Rajan, B. “Trepidation and Excitement.” *Canadian Literature* 28 (Spring 1966): 65–7.**

*Paradise Lost* is a work which is large enough, archetypal enough and some would argue, blurred enough, to invite eager attention by mythological critics. Actually only two substantial studies in this vein have been published—Werblowsky’s *Lucifer and Prometheus* and a temperate book by McCaffrey, bred out of Jung and Cassirer. Northrop Frye is undoubtedly *the* shaman among myth-twirlers, and a book by him on *Paradise Lost* is an event to be faced with trepidation and excitement. Since Frye is incapable of dullness, only one of these expectations is satisfied. Frye may use words like “topocosm” where the uninstructed mind would say simply “world-picture”; but basically he is telling us what critics of the poem have been telling us for several years: that *Paradise Lost* is a vast statement of order, of the entry and perverting (Frye would say “parodic”) energy of disorder, and of the terms on which order can once again be restored. Even the language of the statement is familiar; it is the chain of being, degree, the hierarchic principle and the macro-microcosmic coupling that we are invited to contemplate in different garments.

When mythologists, historicists, and structuralists come together in their descriptions of a poem, their agreement is refreshing evidence that we are looking at the same art-object and that the object is sufficiently formed to permit only a limited range of hesitancy about its nature. (The rising generation of numerologists is a different brood whose assessments have yet to be assayed.) Frye, however, is traditional not only in his descriptions but in more than one of his judgments. When he classifies Milton as a “radical or revolutionary artist” [90], he is building on a distinction made by Coleridge, though ironically, he is applying it in such a way as to make Eliot into a model of twentieth-century radicalism. When he looks repeatedly at the difference between what he calls the conceptual and dramatic aspects of the poem, he is contemplating a road that leads from Blake to Waldo and which virtually every Miltonist has taken. Frye himself does not quite take this road and his hesitations regarding it (which will be looked at later) are among the most interesting aspects of his book.

“All revolutionary myths are sleeping beauty myths” [113], Frye observes in a comment that suggests his own qualities as a radical critic. His is moreover a generic as well as a mythological approach, and if myth is a disclosure of experience, the genre adds to that disclosure a weight of stylization and ornament, an accumulated history of response, that becomes organically a part of the inherited complex that is offered to a writer. It is neither easy nor profitable to separate the intrinsic insights which a myth makes available from those insights which are won from it or drawn into it by usage; the history of a form is also its substance and the critic has no option but to bring his sense of history to bear on his estimate of creative accomplishment.

Because neither Frye’s approach nor the quality of his perceptiveness excludes historical understanding, it is saddening to find him castigating something which he chooses to describe as the “Great Historical Bromide” [101]. No responsible historical critic would blankly concur in the assertion that the problem of Milton’s God “would not exist for the seventeenth-century reader, who could not possibly have felt such resentment for a character clearly labelled ‘God’ and talking like a

seventeenth-century clergyman” [101]. Equally, no historical critic is entitled to suggest that escape routes into the seventeenth century exempt us from the responsibility of coming to terms with the poem in our own time. The historical method does not seek to eliminate the distance between assertion and performance by putting forward hypotheses designed, justly or unconsciously, to annul the difference; it does not seek to persuade us that much that is dismissed as assertion may in reality qualify as performance. The structural propositions about *Paradise Lost* that are advanced with such confidence and are so widely endorsed today, were not self-evident until scholarship taught us to look for them. The historical method also does not suggest that the seventeenth-century response is any substitute for our own; but unless it is impossible to learn from the past, to move through that response is significantly to alter the manner in which the poem lives in us.

The difficulty with Milton’s God is that he enters the epic as an absolute. His point of view commands the poem and is not enveloped by it as are those of lesser agents. Our acceptance of him therefore may be somewhat beyond the acceptance normal to poetry. Yet it is easy to make too much of this further demand. A certain tension between the intellectual knowledge of what we should be and the instinctive pull of what we are is part of the divided nature of man; it can be said to be expressed in the discrepancy between the poem’s conceptual and dramatic aspects, and operates as much in the temptation scene (where Frye does not seem to find the tension destructive) as in the values expressed in the summit of the ascent to light. If this is conceded, it is not necessarily the poet’s function to eliminate the discrepancy, though, to the extent that we grow into the poem, we may succeed in altering its impact. Nevertheless, a discrepancy will remain; it can be evidence that we are involved in a poem and that its moral concerns are real to us and to that degree disturbing. The education of Adam must proceed, and it is no accident that nearly half the poem is concerned with formal instruction by archangels, leaving aside the less tactful teachings of experience. Even the point where the poem starts has its relevance. To hasten into the midst of things is an epic convention; but if we begin in a certain place, it is also because all of us begin there.

It is good to see Frye’s admirable essay on the typology of *Paradise Regained* reprinted, though exception should be taken to its lurid rechristening as “Revolt in the Desert.” Its inclusion in the book enables Frye to pursue further his argument that the paradise within is a natural stage in the evolution of the Paradise myth. This is a better explanation than the view that Milton retreated into quietism because the revolution had betrayed him, not unfortunately, because there is better evidence for it, but because it seeks to ground itself on aesthetic fact rather than personal frustration.

The contrast between the dramatic and the conceptual is particularly disconcerting in *Paradise Regained*. Frye voices the exasperation of many when he says that “Christ becomes an increasingly unsympathetic figure, a pusillanimous quietist in the temptation of Parthia, an inhuman snob in the rejection of Rome, a peevish obscurantist in the rejection of Athens” [134]. Frye, however, goes on to recognize that “All of us are, like Christ, in the world, and unlike him, partly of it. Whatever in us is of the world is bound to condemn Christ’s rejection of the world at some point or other” [134]. The discrepancy, in other words, is not without a function; and because Christ is Christ and not John Milton (a fact too often forgotten in reading the temptation of Athens) a moral recognition can be pushed to an extreme of clarity. If the clarity is too harsh there are grounds for falling short of it. This, or something like it, is the right frame for understanding, though it may be that in using literature for the denial of literature, Milton was involving his readers in a paradox that is too large even for poetry.

**14. Ricks, Christopher. “In Defense of Milton.” *New York Review of Books* 6 (June 1966): 28.**

. . . Northrop Frye's *The Return of Eden* . . . distinguishes two creative temperaments: the conservation and the radical or revolutionary. The distinction is delicately and memorably made: "In listening to the *Kyrie* of the Bach B minor Mass we feel what amazing things the fugue can do; in listening to the finale of Beethoven's Opus 106, we feel what amazing things can be done with the fugue" [91]. Lovely. But then to pigeonhole Milton along with the revolutionaries does him less than justice. He belongs with Shakespeare and Wordsworth precisely because his writing so transcendently balances both the conservative and the revolutionary. In one artistic lifetime, he was both historian and explorer. Of all our writers, he pays the most sincere respect to classical literature, and at the same time he makes it tauntingly new; the epic becomes the anti-epic.

Surely, to adapt Mr. Frye's words, in reading Milton we feel very powerfully both "what amazing things the English language can do," and "what amazing things can be done with the English language." What is at issue is something more than the height of Milton's pedestal, since the literature of our own day has tended to value the revolutionary at the expense of the conservative. The writer whom T. S. Eliot called, "Outside the theatre, our greatest master of freedom within form" made no such mistake.

. . . Mr. Frye's essays were . . . "conceived as an introduction for relatively inexperienced students," but they clearly expect more. This is not Frye the myth critic (the archetypal force of so much in *Paradise Lost* is allowed to speak for itself), but Frye the expositor—patient, lucid, and deftly informative on a thousand topics. Very wittily frank, almost too much so since the wit will stay uneasily in the mind when the qualifying context has dimmed. Of the historical prophecy at the end of *Paradise Lost*: "It is intended to be consoling, although Adam collapses twice under the ordeal of being consoled" [18]. Of the Chorus in *Samson Agonistes*: "standing around uttering timid complacencies in teeth-loosening doggerel" [108]. Of Christ in *Paradise Regained*: "a householder dealing with an importunate salesman" [22].

### 15. Summers, Joseph H. *JEGP* 66 (January 1967): 146–9.

. . . In these five essays Frye treats directly, without footnotes or index and without direct reference to any other reader of Milton after Keats, what he considers the most central issues of the two poems. Frye is our most stimulating critic, and he knows and loves Milton's major poems. Despite his disclaimers, I can imagine few professional Miltonists who would not gain valuable and fresh insights from a careful reading of these essays.

Still, to get the less pleasant over first, the essays strike me as remarkably uneven. Fairly often I find cuteness jarring, academic witticisms a little embarrassing, a general tone of *faux bonhomie* perplexing: in *Paradise Regained*, for example, "Jesus behaves, in four books, like a householder dealing with an importunate salesman" [22]; "Milton insists that, whatever the theologians may say, Raphael really ate the fruit salad provided for him by Eve" [61]; whenever God the Father "opens his ambrosial mouth the sensitive reader shudders" [99]; "Adam and Eve are suburbanites in the nude, and like other suburbanites they are preoccupied with gardening, with their own sexual relations, and with the details of their rudimentary housekeeping" [66]. Perhaps a good deal of this may represent nervous attempts to recapture readers or hearers whom the author fears he may lose. And such fears might be justified. Frye is a writer who is much quicker to see resemblances than to make distinctions (he likes resemblances more, too, I think), and his writing often seems to reflect the speed of his perceptions; he can skip from analogy to analogy, from detail to detail, and then be off again. The effect is sometimes of hit-and-run criticism; it is difficult for the spectators to reconstruct in detail exactly what happened: "Milton shows a touch of impatience with Plato and with what he calls Plato's "airy burgomasters," and we should expect him to be of Spenser's mind in this matter. And just as the encyclopaedic shape



of the Bible is condensed into the speech of Michael, so the speech of Raphael versifies a major prose genre, for the colloquy of Raphael and Adam is a Socratic dialogue without irony, a symposium with unfermented wine, a description of an ideal commonwealth ending with the expulsion of undesirables, and (for Adam is king of men) a cyropedia, or manual of royal discipline" [12] At this speed the syntactical relationships blur, the pronominal references become vague. One wishes to ask, "Please say that again, slowly." (I did find that a number of my difficulties dissolved with my second reading of the book.)

But more than simply questions of taste and speed are at stake in sections such as the elaborate descriptions of the clock dial which records "the total action" of *Paradise Lost*. Frye remarks that "Some of the divisions take up several books and others only a few lines, but that is of no importance" [18]. The entire passage reads like a cruel parody of Frye's method at its weakest: something happens every hour (the Fall at six o'clock and the Last Judgment at eleven); but no one can be sure whether the clock represents "real" time or God's time or the poem's time—Sin and Death, for example, do not appear until after the War in Heaven. Within another extended passage on reason appetite, and passion, sex and hunger, lust and greed, turning outward and turning inward, force and fraud, Frye notes, seemingly without irony, that "the perverted qualities of appetite" are "excess and mechanical repetition" [72]. Whatever the cause, something is obviously wrong when the analogical machine seems to work away on its own, with no human intelligence clearly in charge. Is it dangerous to confuse mnemonic devices or abstracted schemata or metaphors with the structure of reality—or even with the action of a poem. Frye's frequent statements of identity (X is "the same as" Y) when he seems really to mean that he has perceived some sort of similarity or relevance are, I believe, symptomatic of his greatest weakness.

To complete my personal list of disagreements, the following strike me as either mistaken in emphasis or just wrong: the sentence, "Doubtless the faithful angels could have defeated the rebels by themselves" [25]; the analogy between Eden and Leviathan; the remarks on Galileo; the account of Adam's conversation just before the Fall; the analogy between the Fall and Virgil's Dido episode; the parallel between Samson and Coriolanus; most of the comments on Book VIII. The last two sentences in Frye's book seem to me more mysterious than anything in Milton.

But having made all these objections (and it would be possible to make others), one feels not only petty but ungrateful. For what do most of them matter beside the simple facts that Milton's poems and Milton's vision of human liberty have kindled Frye's imagination and have caused him to write some marvelous passages? If we recognize anything at all about the Fall, we should know that we cannot in this life eliminate all of what we consider our critics' flaws and still preserve their virtues. And some of Frye's greatest virtues are in evidence here.

Frye's emphasis on Milton's radicalism and his individualism are healthy correctives to the influential readings which emphasize hierarchy and tradition: "We seem to find in Milton, then, a revolutionary who became disillusioned with the English people to achieve a free commonwealth, and was finally compelled to find the true revolution within the individual. Reactionaries and obscurantists of all kinds are always delighted with this solution, because they know of no conception of the individual except the opaque ego and Satan's defiant 'here at least we shall all be free,' in a world far removed from any threat of the status quo" [112]. To correct such responses, Frye remarks that "hell is a model for perverted orders of society, whether in state or church. . . . The tendency for a king to acquire the same kind of 'false glitter' that Satan still has in hell is endemic in monarchy" [106]. "The New Testament presents God as determined to set man free despite man's efforts to resist his own liberty" [94]. He also remarks on "the two infallible signs of a perverted church: inquisition and indulgence, the desire to suppress freedom of thought and the tendency to provide easy formulas for the less dangerous vices" [71].

Frye develops brilliantly the suggestion that our proper model for God the Father should be interior and mental rather than exterior and social. He puts to rest (forever, one hopes) the mistaken notions about God, Chaos, and the Creation which derive largely from Saurat: "To make something, whether a poem out of the babble of words or a statue out of a block or [sic] marble, is to extend our presence and consciousness into an area where it has not previously been. So with God. Chaos is that into which God's presence chooses not to extend itself; creation is that into which his presence has extended itself" [42–3]. His comments on reason and freedom and on the law and the gospel make difficult matter plain and command immediate assent. . . . Frye even states precisely the most important corrective for traditional mythological criticism of Milton's poems: "We are not to read the great cycle of events in *Paradise Lost* cyclically: if we do we shall be reading it fatalistically" [102].

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *The Return of Eden* is that most of its readers will almost inevitably share something of Frye's imaginative conception of Milton's epics as poems of the utmost importance for all of us, here and now.

#### Other Reviews

Blondel, J. *Études anglaises* 19 (October–December 1966): 216–18.

Empson, William. "An Anatomy of Taste." *New Statesman* 72 (2 December 1966): 838.

Hamilton, Alice. *Dalhousie Review* 46 (Autumn 1966): 411, 413.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Man—In Time and Eternity." *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 July 1966 [Leisure Magazine section], 7.

Lievsay, John L. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 66 (Spring 1967): 260–3.

Lobdell, David. "Paradise Lost Viewed with Modern Outlook." *Sherbrooke Record*, 5 February 1966.

Oras, Ants. "Miltonic Themes." *Sewanee Review* 77 (Winter 1969): 183–4.

Rajan, B. *Alphabet* 11 [misnumbered as 8] (December 1965–March 1966): 74–5.

Sirluck, Ernest. *Studies in English Literature: 1500–1900* 6 (Winter 1966): 187–8.