CHAPTER V

A PLEA FOR ROMANTICISM

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF CREATIVE AUTONOMY

Northrop Frye's emphasis on the "creative" aspect of his literary criticism expresses a tension already existing deep within Romanticism. And we noted that he drew his inspiration from his study of Blake. We also observed how pairs of dialectically opposed categories are ultimately subsumed under the most expansive of his critical categories, the visionary imagination, where his doctrine of the imagination is rooted in his alliance with the Romantic tradition. This becomes apparent when we consider that Frye has devoted more attention to writers of this tradition than any other particular movement in literature. It, therefore, comes naturally to us to accept that Frye's commentaries on specific works and writers merge into his theory of criticism. As much as he would have liked to have had a book of "practical criticism, a sort of morphology of symbolism," to act as an adjunct to the "pure critical theory" of the Anatomy (Anatomy
vii) we see that Frye cannot help but resort to making theoretical assumptions much the same as we find in Fearful Symmetry, which, though supposedly a work of practical criticism on Blake's prophecies, is weighted with theoretical speculation.

Blake is one of the poets who believe that, as Wallace Stevens says, the only subject of poetry is poetry itself, and that the writing of a poem is itself a theory of poetry. He interests a critic because he removes the barriers between poetry and criticism. His language in his later prophecies is almost deliberately colloquial and "unpoetic", as though he intended his poetry to be also a work of criticism just as he expected the critic's response to be also a creative one. For him, the artist demonstrates a certain way of life: his aim is not to be appreciated or admired, but to transfer to others the imaginative habit and energy of his mind. The main work of criticism is teaching, and teaching for Blake cannot be separated from creation. ("The Road of Excess" 232)

It would be difficult not to overstate the
influence of Blake on Frye as nearly all of the theoretical and practical criticism that he has written since *Fearful Symmetry* has attempted to explain or apply principles he learned from Blake:

It seemed to me obvious that, after accepting the poetic form of a poem as its primary basis of meaning, the next step was to look for its context within literature itself. . . . Every poet has his own distinctive structure of imagery, which usually emerges even in his earliest work, and which does not and cannot essentially change. . . . I became aware of its importance myself, when working on Blake, as soon as I realized that Blake's special symbolic names and the like did form a genuine structure of poetic imagery. . . . Blake had always been regarded as a poet with a "Private symbolism" locked up in his own mind, but this conception of him was so fantastically untrue that overcoming it carried me much further than merely correcting a mistaken notion of Blake. (Critical Path 21-22)

But by Frye's admission, "the great value of Blake is
that he insists so urgently on this question of an imaginative iconography, and forces us to learn so much of its grammar in reading him" (Fearful Symmetry 421). This reliance on Blake is perhaps, the contributing factor towards Frye's Romantic sensibilities. In A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance, while referring to Coleridge's division of literary critics into either Iliad or Odyssey types, Frye says that one's "Interest in literature tends to center either in the area of tragedy, realism, and irony, or in the area of comedy and romance" (1), and refers to himself as being "temperamentally an Odyssean critic" (2). And in The Secular Scripture he is bold enough to assert that "Romance is the structural core of all fiction" (15).

From the body of Frye's practical criticism and the examples he chooses to illustrate his arguments, we see that he relies more on the Romantic poets and writers, from among Blake, Spencer, Milton, Shakespeare, Shelly, Keats, Wallace Stevens, and William Morris.

Most of the subjects of his criticism fall within the "central tradition of mythopoeic poetry" or his own, rather wry, version of "the Great Tradition,"
which he calls in deliberate parody of Eliot's Classical, Royalist, and Anglo-Catholic pronouncements, "Romantic, radical, and Protestant" (Fables 1). The definitions of these terms are enunciated in his essay on Blake in Fables of Identity. Frye defines "Romantic" as "the principle of creative autonomy" (147); by "radical" he means "a sense that the final cause of society is the free individual" (147); and by "Protestant" he means "the tendency to anchor the apocalyptic vision in a direct individual experience" (145). Though Frye rejects all selected traditions on grounds that they are built on non-literary value judgements, he advocates the cause of the tradition of Romantic liberalism. He says that "the idea of the free society implied in culture can never be formulated, much less established as a society" and that "the goal of ethical criticism is transvaluation, the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture" (Anatomy 348), where "culture" is defined as "the total body of imaginative hypothesis in a society and its tradition" (127). We saw earlier that Frye's concept of culture differed from that of Arnold's in that Frye includes the
twentieth century's insistence on autotelic art. "To defend the autonomy of culture," Frye says, "is the social task of the 'Intellectual' in the modern world" (127).

The attack on Romanticism initiated early in the century by T.E. Hulme, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and T.S. Eliot, viewed the Romantic critic as the antagonist; Walter Pater, Sainte-Beuve, and Taine, for example, whose method of appreciation and judgement of poetry is genetic. Frye sees the Classical, Tory, and Catholic emphases of modernism as a "Consciously intellectual reaction" to the Romantic Tradition (Fables 149). He says that the "most articulate supporters" of the reaction

were cultural evangelists who came from places like Missouri and Idaho, and who had a clear sense of the shape of the true English tradition from its beginnings in Provence and mediaeval Italy to its later developments in France. Mr. Eliot's version of this tradition was finally announced as Classical, Royalist, and Anglo-Catholic, implying that whatever was Protestant, radical, and Romantic would have to go into the intellectual doghouse. Many
others who did not have the specific motivations of Mr. Eliot or of Mr. Pound joined in the chorus of denigration of Mitonic, Romantic, liberal, and allied values. . . . Although the fashion itself is on its way out, the prejudices set up by it still remain. (149)

Frye believes that the prejudices of modernism are still extant and he directs a major section of his practical criticism towards correcting the modernist tradition which he considers as having consisted mainly of "pseudo-critical hokum" (149). In Romanticism, Frye perceives "one of the most decisive changes in the history of culture, so decisive as to make everything written since post-Romantic, including, of course, everything that is regarded by its producers as anti-Romantic" (3). And says:

What I see first of all in Romanticism is the effect of a profound change, not primarily in belief, but the spatial projection of reality. This in turn leads to a different localizing of the various levels of that reality. Such as change in the localizing of images is bound to
be accompanied by, or even cause, changes in belief or attitude. . . . But the change itself is not in belief or attitude, and may be found in, or at least affecting, poets of a great variety of beliefs. (Stubborn Structure 203)

Romanticism therefore, as a literary phenomenon, is representative of change, both, in poetic imagery and the traditional idea of the four levels of reality against which images are portrayed.

The Romantics reject the neoclassical concern with rules and recognize the importance of any diction or mode if it is organically suitable, for, the analogue of form and content is for them the essence. One does note here an emphasis on individual nature of the works that an artist produces. As Frye would have us understand:

The Romantic tradition has one thing in it of great value: it encourages the poet to find his symbols in his own way, and does not impose a priori patterns on his imagination. Blake could have told Baudelaire that if he pursued his vision of evil far enough, it
would eventually take the form of a gigantic, cruel, elusive and shadowy whore, drunk with the blood of poets and part of the indifference of the order of nature. ... And it was perhaps an advantage to Baudelaire not to be told that. But the advantage of having a large public able instantly to recognise his giantess would far outweigh the very remote possibility that he would not have had a sense enough to realize, as Blake did, that he should create his own symbolic system and not be enslaved by another man's. It is with criticism as with so many other aspects of contemporary life; for better or worse the reign of laissez faire is over, and the problem of achieving order without regimentation is before us. (Fearful Symmetry 423)

On this view artists no longer have a common set of criteria which critics can take stock of in their study of poetry against the backdrop of either the Aristotelian concepts of probability and necessity or the Augustan concepts of appreciation. Thus the poet's vision give rise to sincerity, spontaneity,
originality, and adequacy as the criteria for criticism.
II. ROMANTICISM AND MODERNISM

At one stage Frye remarks that "it is fortunate that art does not have to wait for critical theory to keep pace with it" (Fearful Symmetry 423), and at the same time also observes that "our art has passed beyond Romanticism but our criticism is still largely in it" (412). It would perhaps, be pertinent here to refer to Jose Ortega y Gasset's The Dehumanization of Art as a typical example of a modernist view. Gasset's book marks a significant moment in the twentieth-century's preoccupation of assessing the importance of art to life. The Dehumanization of Art is basically concerned with seeing modern art as "a thing of no consequence" to modern life. Gasset is of the opinion that "all the peculiarities of modern art" could be explained by "this one feature of its renouncing its importance" -- a feature which showed art's ironic, self-deprecating acceptance of its devalued "position in the hierarchy of human activities and interests." In conclusion he observes, that art "has lost none of its attributes, but it has become a minor issue" (49-52).

This willing withdrawal to an inconsequential
and insignificant place in human life, according to Gasset, radically reversed the expectations that the Romantics had previously brought to art. As Michael R. Fischer observes:

Far from simply contradicting these expectations, moreover, the self-denial of art witnessed by Ortega was undermining the very foundations of the Romantic view. For the same aspects of art which for Ortega were minimizing its importance to life were for the Romantic writers the very source and safeguard of art's social value. From the sociological point of view, for example, both Ortega and the Romantic writers saw artists as isolated, and ignored figures gravitating toward the periphery of their indifferent society. But, for the Romantic writers these solitaries remained the "unacknowledged legislators of the world" whose very isolation seemed to protect and permit their needed vision. . . both Ortega and the Romantic critics stressed art's discontinuity from the ordinary, familiar world. But for the Romantics, art's ability to
create anew the commonly viewed universe constituted genuine insight into the life of things rather than a self-deprecating, dehumanizing refusal to represent reality. Art's distance from everyday reality, in other words, signified not its withdrawal from life but its access to higher truths—truths which in daily life we tragically do not see, blinded as we are by "the lethargy of custom" and the "film of familiarity and selfish solicitude." ("The Imagination as a Sanction of Value: Northrop Frye and the Uses of Literature" 105-17)

The concept that an object was "more than met the eye," a concept that was shared by many artists, was highlighted by the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico. "Every object," he wrote, "has two aspects: The common aspect, which is the one we generally see and which is seen by everyone, and the ghostly and metaphysical aspect, which only rare individuals see at moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical meditation. A work of art must relate something that does not appear in its
visible form." Chirico's works reveal this "ghostly" aspect of things. They are dreamlike transpositions of reality, which arise as visions from the unconscious. His creations based on the "metaphysical" aspect is expressed in a panic-stricken rigidity signifying a senselessness of life, and where statues of gods are thrown into bold over-acute perspective to conjure up the classical past. Chirico symbolizes the kind of creative mind whose basic tendencies were Romantic, but whose unconscious has been involved in the fundamental dilemma of modern existence.

As a contrast to the dualistic approach of Chirico's, Gasset's position was that of interpreting the dual aspects of art as signs of diminished importance to life and as indications of art's "self-ridiculing refusal to fulfill the demands brought to it in the past" (Fischer 106). While Chirico, influenced by the philosophies of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, saw

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that in the senselessness of life transposed in art lay "untroubled beauty of matter," Gasset strove to prove the Romantic viewpoint to be contrary to experience; that art was to be kept separate from everyday realities; and that the artist had only a marginal social status. Gasset, thereby, challenged literary theorists and defenders of art who were inclined towards Romanticism and the Romantic tradition to show that their assertion that art's relation to reality and society does in fact confirm art's value rather than demonstrate and hence, endorse its uselessness.

Frye, as we have noted elsewhere, has been increasingly concerned with underlining the importance of the relation of literature to life. He can be seen as having implicitly taken up Gasset's challenge and he has chosen to do so from within rather than without the Romantic tradition. Frye's idea is to identify literature's significance to life with the very aspects of literature which appear to affirm its separation from familiar realities and society. He sets out to show that the apparently opposite function between literature and life are the faces of the same coin and constitutes rather than opposes the social and moral values derived from literature. This view of
literature's relation to society. Frye admits, is an extension of the earlier Romantic and post-Romantic critics who believed that poets were "The unacknowledged legislators of the world." Frye too endorses the moral and social significance of literature for purely Romantic reasons. He is of the opinion that we create our real society through imaginative vision; and without imaginative vision people and societies cannot exist, for, the human situation is "both a social and cultural environment, and only the cultural environment, the world we study in the arts and sciences, can provide the kind of standards and values we need if we're to do anything better than adjust" (Educated Imagination 153). This effort to find a link between the discontinuity of literature from life and literature's value to life is in direct opposition to Gasset's assertion that art, on the same argument, endorses its uselessness. Thus, instead of ironically deprecating literature's importance to life, the imaginative vision is, for Frye, the essential construct of literature's social and moral uses. There, however, is a point of agreement between Frye and Gasset, for Frye too admits that we must accept art's worthlessness as an objective determinant and truthful supporter of human values.
The Romantic writers, of course, tended to share Frye's inclination to deny moral authority and insight to reason and also demonstrated his related willingness to distinguish literature from extra-literary, rational and detached accounts of reality. But they were not willing to surrender their desire for genuine knowledge from imaginative works. For them literature had to earn its esteemed position in the scale of human interests by offering true insight into the life of things. The imagination's claims to disclose truth seemed inextricably bound up with its moral significance to man; the value of literature to life appeared necessarily to rest on the truthful relation of imaginative vision to what we regard as real. The poet, in Keats's phrase, could be termed a "friend to man" if and only if his insights could be respected as true. (Fischer 115-16)

This Romantic viewpoint is the central concern for Frye as well. Frye, however, while accepting that ethical values and imaginative vision lie beyond the scope of rational knowledge strikes a difference in that he
suggests that the imagination only conceives possibilities but does not represent actual truths. "By trying to ground literature's moral and social importance on the cognitive basis of its truths, the Romantic writers sought to make literature a genuinely critical social force which was able to expose illegitimate values from a perspective that could be defended as true. Writers like Shelley and Wordsworth affirmed opposition to unjustifiable social practices or ethical premises not as a mere possibility but as an imperative based on fact." (16). This is a direct contrast to Gasset's view that art is now "a minor issue," and Frye here forces us to reinterpret the Romantic faith in literature's critical power. The Romantics can be seen as authorizing the Frye "who has man imagine the forms that shape his world in response to human desire, thus creating his culture that has its own authenticity, in distinction from that objectively authenticated world of nature, bound by its ineluctable processes. That culture is our dream. . . .it becomes our truth, the truth of our poetry. And all our ideas are in that sense poetic" (Krieger, "Critical Legacy" 472-73). Or as Frye says at the end of Fearful Symmetry: "Our art has passed beyond Romanticism, but
our criticism is still largely in it" (421).

Eliot, writing on "The Local Flavour" in 1919, a few years before Gasset's *The Dehumanization of Art*, had said that "the important critic is the person who is absorbed in the present problems of art," but adds, "and who wishes to bring the forces of the past to bear upon the solution of these problems" (*Sacred Wood* 37-38). Eliot's criticism, it has been generally accepted, was, in part, written in defence of modernism, and it was perhaps inevitable that modernist criticism be as misunderstood as modernist poetry. While it is true that Eliot rarely discusses the background of ideas behind a work, and he has been credited for fathering the "new criticism," his critique of Romanticism and his observations on the various periods of literature give rise to speculation of a literary history, whose focus is not so much on ideas as it is on the way in which those ideas are given literary form. To enquire into Eliot's ideas would only result in the first stage of our understanding of them and his concept of literary history is basically Romantic in its reliance on the past—a kind of nostalgia for a lost golden age.
Even as he attacks Romantic solipsism...
Eliot partakes... of another aspect of the Romantic sensibility—the tendency to look back to a source of value. Blake seeks a lost innocence of vision, Wordsworth a lost unity with the natural world; Coleridge seeks to revive our sense of wonder, Yeats our reverence for "traditional sanctity and loveliness." The same looking-back is characteristic of Romantic criticism in its different phases; the golden age of art is always somewhere in the past, a perished Eden, like Eliot's age of unified sensibility, which the critic hopes to revive. This common thread of historical myth is at the centre of Eliot's relationship to Romantic criticism. (Lobb 162)

Eliot's version of literary history constitutes a kind of historical myth which centres on the idea of a crisis in language— the dissociation of sensibility— and the diminished power of poetry in the ages following. As Frye would have us recount, it is the story of Eden adapted to the secular history of literature, a kind of secular scripture. This literary
myth was the brain-child of the Romantics, and Eliot's adaptation of it speaks of a Romantic heritage that requires investigation.

Eliot found within the Romantic poets themselves most of the arguments which he used in his critique of Romanticism. This apparent paradox may be easily explained by noting Eliot's use of the word "Romantic" which was the greatest obstacle to distinguishing the good from the bad, and often paradoxical concepts that the present age is heir to. Eliot's definition of Romanticism laid stress on the confusion of the subject and object dichotomy which he saw as a growing tendency in English literature from the time of the Metaphysical poets, particularly from the time of Donne. Much as he would have liked to resolve this dichotomy within a philosophical mental construct, Eliot claimed to have no capacity for abstruse thought and there is much in his comments on his own work to support such contentions. He wrote to Paul Elmer More that he was not a systematic thinker and admitted to E.M. Forster that his essays' apparent logic was couched in an element of bluff. Although, "ontology" and other philosophical terms in Eliot's criticism have crept in, they were primarily metaphors for the general problem
of subject and object in poetry. He could do nothing with prevailing, imprecise usage, except, perhaps, share the frustration of his contemporaries:

I suggest that the difficulties which veil most Critics' theories of Romanticism (and I include such writers as Pierre Lassere and Irvin Babbitt) are largely due to two errors. One is that the critic applies the same term 'romantic' to epochs and to individual artists, not perceiving that it assumes a difference of meaning; and the other is that he assumes that the terms 'romantic' and 'Classic' are mutually exclusive and even antithetical, without actually enforcing this exclusiveness in the examination of particular works of art. ("A French Romantic" 703)

This mutual exclusiveness which Eliot talks of here is something he himself could not reconcile with. Eliot's own arguments in favour of Classicism in his essays of the 'nineteen-twenties, which find concentration in the "Preface" to For Lancelot Andrews, establish the fact that Eliot's sympathies were obviously with the classical, and since neo-classicism was in current
favour at the time with the criticism of Babbitt and More, Eliot, too came to be grouped along with the classicists, both, in sympathies as well as in practice. But Eliot's view that a poet in a romantic age cannot be a "classical" poet except in tendency ("Baudelaire," Selected Essays 424), need not preclude the fact that there is a Romantic tendency in his work which is as important as the Classical. In Eliot's sense of the term, Keats was as much a "Classical" in that he sought to transcend subjective, individual perception, as Eliot was "Romantic" in his concern with the non-disursive image.

Eliot's relation to the Romantic tradition offers, although only partially, an answer to one of the questions that have vexed critics of this century: whether modernism was in fact a new movement or largely a continuation and development of Romantic ideas. The extent to which modernism as a whole was a revision or extension of Romanticism is still a matter of debate, and Eliot's dislike of Romanticism, and his cryptic remarks at the expense of Romantic poets are a matter of record. Recent scholarship, however, has tended to focus on Eliot's relation to the Romantic tradition.
Frank Kermode, in the *Romantic Image*, deals with the origins of the symbolist concern with non-discursive images; C.K. Stead, in *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot*, discusses the modern poets' desire to reunite the roles of seer and public spokesman; and George Bornstein, in *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* makes pertinent references to Eliot's resistance to, and reconciliation with, Romanticism. The concern of all the three critics is with Eliot's divided loyalties and the dualism of his public classicism and his covering cherub, Romanticism.

Kermode's intention in *The Romantic Image* is to revise the critical ideas of the English Romantics from contemporary symbolist (Mallarmean and Poe-esque) perspectives. He takes as his subjects Blake, Coleridge, Arnold, Pater, the French Symbolists, the English poets of the 1890s, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the New Critics; and while he appears to be deliberately subordinating and sometimes ignoring basic philosophical differences in the critical differences he focuses upon, he nevertheless, is able to perceive important likenesses among the apparently dissimilar. Kermode is of the opinion that a gainful dialectical
opposition in romantic thought, between the poet as "representative man" of universal passions and the poet as different from others, gets absorbed in the obsession peculiar to the way in which poets are inclined to think about themselves. The benefit of such a system for the poet, who is cut off from normal interactions with social reality, is that he is allowed to enjoy the visionary mode of contemplation, which in turn leads him to create what Kermode calls the "Image" through the creative perception. "Poetry," Kermode writes, "by virtue of the image is; prose merely describes" (127-28). He also remarks that everywhere in romantic thought there exists a distinction between symbol and allegory (112-13). The distinction here referred to is the ontological one ("the image is") similar to the Coleridgean line of argument that symbol "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible," while allegory is "unsubstantial," a "translation of abstract notions into a picture language." Symbol permits a vision of ultimate being as it closes the distance between consciousness and the ultimate origin of things, while as an arbitrary and abstract discourse, allegory maintains ontological separation and the division of subject and object.
This sort of distinction existing within romanticism between symbol and allegory is similar to the dualisms found in contemporary criticism between the poetic and literary, or the scientific and ordinary kinds of discourses. As Frank Lentricchia observes: "within the perspective afforded by romantic tradition we may come to feel that the urgency in his (Kermode's) injunction is motivated by a long-standing romantic need to protect a quasi-religious, ontological sanctuary from all secularizing discourses that would situate literature in history" (After the New Criticism).

Eliot's view of literary history is basically Romantic in its nostalgia for a lost golden age. He betrays a debt to three Romantic poet-critics, Keats, Wordsworth, and Arnold. Moreover, Eliot's use of the Middle Ages as an "image" bears a likeness to the Romantics and their Victorian successors. To point out these affinities is not to merely diagnose an anxiety of influence, but as the author of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was well aware of, it is only in the acceptance and use of a living tradition that any real originality is possible.

C.K. Stead tries to establish the links of some
of Eliot's ideas to the Romantic tradition. He shows, in *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot*, that Eliot's theory of poetics is basically Romantic. He observes:

These three essays ("Tradition and the Individual Talent," "Ben Jonson," and "Hamlet") . . . show how obsessively concerned Eliot was at this time with a process of poetry in which the conscious will played only the minor role of sub-editor. His remarks imply a kind of poetic composition at least as dependent on spontaneous "imagination" and "inspiration" as that which any of the romantic poets might have affirmed. (131)

Stead is concerned with Eliot's treatment of "the problem of conscious direction and unconscious process in the writing of poetry," and by analysing the forms in which sections of "The Hollow Men" first appeared, he reaches the conclusion that "the structural unity of (Eliot's) early poetry is a unity of feeling" rather than of form (170). Stead's conclusion is based on the fact that the Georgians and Imagists, Yeats, Pound, and Eliot are all part of a movement away from the shortcomings of discursive poetry. The common factor they share being that they concentrate on the clear
presentation of an image or situation, and thereby express" a level of mind deeper and more obscure than that at which conscious thought and 'opinion' are supreme: where . . . the mind of the individual becomes the general mind of the race" (35). As a final solution, Stead offers to see Eliot's criticism as apart from his poetry since one cannot avoid generalization in a poem but not in a prose argument where some conclusion is called for, as a combination of techniques:

A close scrutiny of Eliot's criticism will show, I believe, . . . the gradual realization of a poetic technique . . . designed to bring into balance the two halves of the divided sensibility; a technique which weighs, on the one hand, that part of the poet's mind which rationalizes, constructs, and, in the rhetorician, illegitimately persuades and pleases at the expense of complex truth; and, on the other hand, that passive part of the mind which negatively comprehends complexity, and provides images to embody it, but fails on its own to construct, assert, or even affirm. (126)
The argument which is based upon the assumption of these techniques depends finally upon image, and hence upon the reader's imagination.

The image may be a single picture of a period, or a quotation, or the whole corpus of a writer's work: in any case, it allows for a radical simplification of what the image represents. Like the $x$ in an algebraic equation, it acquires a value from what is done with it. Donne and Cowley become emblems of the directions of poetry after them, Dante the exemplar of poetic perfection and clear sight. Eliot's argument is not spared the task of assertion, but the selection of images, and their arrangement make the point more eloquently—and less refutably—than mere argument could. (Lobb 91).

A characteristic feature of Eliot's prose style, which has been often commented upon is the combination of assertion and reticence to a noticeable degree. This feature is particularly noticeable in his critical essays during the period from 1918 to 1936, which has led Bernard Bergonzi to comment that there is in the
prose, "an effect of extreme evasiveness despite its polemical sharpness of tone" (T.S. Eliot 26). The attack is mainly directed against the apparent banality with which Eliot makes critical statements about literature and sensibility, or passes final judgement on a poet or critic with a total disregard or reasoned logicality. While bearing in mind Eliot's admission to E.M. Forster that the essays' apparent logic concealed an element of bluff, the answer to the elusiveness may be sought in his attitude to argumentation itself. Although Eliot held certain strong ideas about the nature of the relationship between sensibility and language, he did not try to formulate a systematic theory of literature in the sense that Northrop Frye lays claims to. And as Edward Lobb comments:

Between the fundamental points of Eliot's 'classicism' there is much feeling about literature, relatively articulable but not susceptible of demonstration in reasoned argument; hence the use of symbolic images.. .. Criticism was, for Eliot, a branch of rhetoric rather than of philosophy; it was natural for him to treat it as an art of persuasion rather than a science of 'proof'.
Eliot, if may be noted, also learned and adapted a fair amount about the technique and conduct of argument from the Romantics and their nineteenth-century successors. The use of historical myth which is in itself as much an argumentative technique as it is an idea, is a case in point. The ideas that Eliot found most relevant to his purpose and that were central to his own modernist aesthetics has been summed up and summarized by Lobb as follows:

1. The value of historical myth as a way of embodying literary and aesthetic values (cf. Schiller, Keats, Arnold, Ruskin):

2. The importance of perception by the whole mind rather than an isolated intellectual faculty (cf. Schiller, Keats, Wordsworth):

3. The necessity of clear (objective) sight as a means of avoiding solipsism (cf. Keats, Arnold, Ruskin, Hulme, Pound):

4. The inadequacy of poetry which reflects primarily the intellect and which becomes, as a result, overtly, philosophical or 'ruminative' (cf. Keats, Arnold). (136)

And Eliot's other borrowings from the Romantics is summed up under the following headings:
1. The use of medieval art and thought as a standard by which to judge the modern (cf. Ruskin, Hulme, Keats, Pound);

2. The reifying of argument through the juxtaposition of symbolic images (cf. Ruskin's use of Gothic and Renaissance monuments to represent the ethos of each period with Eliot's use of Donne and Crashaw as types of images of promiscuous Thought and Feeling, his conscious simplifying of literary periods, his placement of writers in diagrammatic relationship to each other, etc.);

3. The sophisticated use of a variety of rhetorical strategies, developed most fully by the Victorians, which depend less on sequential argument than acquainting the reader with the 'feel' of an idea through control of tone, implication metaphor, etc. (136-37)

Once again we find ourselves confronted with Kermode's concept of the 'image' as a unifying motif that is the Romantic concern with the ideas as an "ineffable or indemonstrable" construct that can be persuasively
conveyed through the image. Just as in Eliot's poetry and theory of poetry, the idea can be seen to operate in his practice of criticism as well; "it works as much through embodied ideas as through 'legitimate' argument" (137).

To argue thus is to suggest that Eliot's use of Romantic criticism was deliberate. It remains a matter of record that Eliot was familiar with most of the Romantic critics, but the question of influence upon Eliot should be regarded as secondary as he was more inclined to use the earlier poet-critics in formulating his own ideas. Similarly with the Romantics, is not in any supposed borrowings; it lies rather in the common perception of an issue or problem and the attempt to come to terms with it imaginatively. Like Arnold, Eliot found himself, in a Romantic age, desiring a classic clarity of expression; he was eventually to conclude that 'a poet in a romantic age, cannot be a "classical" poet except in tendency'. The divided consciousness gave rise in each case to a rich body of criticism in which the age could see itself, and literature, anew.(81: underlining mine)
Finally, it is worth mentioning that F.H. Bradley is not the "onlie begetter" and fountain-head of Eliot's criticism. There is, however, a considerable body of work devoted to tracing Eliot's indebtedness to Bradley, and the subject is too important to ignore, but the definitive relation of Eliot's literary criticism to Bradley's philosophy remains open to debate. Richard Wollheim, whose views on Bradley we have had occasion to refer to earlier in our discussion on Eliot's religious views, is inclined to believe that Eliot's theories of tradition and literary history are "only marginally grounded in philosophy" ("Eliot and P.H. Bradley: An Account" 189). To insist further would have the effect of making Eliot into a "derivative and eclectic philosopher--a second-hand Bradley--but he is a great and original critic within the tradition that he modifies and carries on. . . . Eliot belongs. . . to a tradition of specifically literary thought which begins in England with Sidney (practically speaking) and which is the only thing necessary to render him comprehensible" (Lobb 160). And,

Even if the concept of dissociation of sensibility were derived from Bradley and only
from Bradley, the myth of literary history in which it is embodied, and without which it would remain at a very high level of abstraction, could only have been derived from literary criticism—specifically... the historical mythography of the Romantic Poets. It is general knowledge, if not quite a common place, that the Romantics were also interested in the relation of subject and object in poetry; it seems plausible to suppose, then that Eliot's ideas about literature came primarily from literary sources, while his vocabulary and analogies were influenced by his philosophical reading. His relation to Keats, Coleridge and Victorian historiography (as well as his use of Gourmont, which has been noted by several commentators) is substantive. His relation to Bradley, though it may have been philosophically decisive, is in terms of literary significance, slight.

The matter of influence, however slight, cannot entirely be ignored. Especially so when the man who said "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal" was willing to acknowledge his debts, and the role of tradition as is understood in "Tradition and the
Individual Talent" is that of a helpful and liberating force. Any attempts to define the influence of the tradition would, in absence of definitive evidence, prove to be purely speculative irrespective of whether the tradition was consciously or unconsciously used, and one can look upon Eliot's critical achievement as original and thought provoking. Even if there were no evidence, "Eliot's place in the [Romantic] tradition would nevertheless be established, simply by the similarity of his ideas and methods to those of the Romantics. The probable mixture of tradition and innovation, whatever the exact proportions may be shows Eliot as the ideal Janus of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (137).