CHAPTER VII
In Frye's book, *A Study of English Romanticism*, the Romantic movement is treated primarily as a change in the mythological structure of poetry brought about by various cultural and historical forces. In an introductory chapter entitled "The Romantic Myth," Frye, in fact, argues the central thesis of the study. The remainder of the book consists of three chapters devoted to critical discussions and analysis of three English Romantic works: Beddoes's *Death's Jest-Book*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Keat's *Endymion*. Frye's commentary, however, is not primarily directed toward an interpretation of the works themselves, but, rather, the three writers are used to illustrate his conception of Romanticism. His practical criticism may be seen as existing for the sake of the theory rather than vice versa, although much of his commentary would be useful in developing an interpretation. "Any reader who finds (my) approach to these poets somewhat peripheral," Frye cautions, "is asked to remember that this is not a book
on Beddoes or Keats or Shelley, but a book on Romanticism as illustrated by some of their works" (v-vi).

Relying upon his conceptions of myth and mythology, Frye claims that Romanticism leads us to a reinterpretation of a new mythological structure in Western culture:

The informing structures of literature are myths, that is, fictions and metaphors that identify aspects of human personality with the natural environment, such as stories about sun-gods or tree-gods. The metaphorical nature of the god who is both a person and a class of natural objects makes myth, rather than folktale or legend, the direct ancestor of literature. It also gives to myth, in primitive cultures, a particular importance in establishing a society's views of its origin, including the reasons for its divisions into different classes or groups, its legal sanctions, and its prescribed rituals. The canonical significance which distinguishes the myth from large unified structures, or
mythologies, which tend to become encyclopedic in extent, covering all aspects of a society's vision of its situation and destiny. As civilization develops, mythology divides into two main aspects. Its pattern of stories and images, attracting and absorbing those of legend and folktale, become the fictions and metaphors of literature. At the same time, there are also germs of conceptual ideas in myths which extend into theology, philosophy, political theory, and, in earlier ages, science, and become informing principles there as well. (4-5)

Myths, according to this assumption, manifest themselves in two ways, artistically and conceptually. The first view holds that literature and other forms of art descend from mythology, inheriting its functional and metaphorical patterns which one can study formally. The other view is that there is a body of ideas which descends from myth, because myth is related to certain social features in a society. Both these forms, artistic and conceptual, form part of what Frye calls a culture's "total mythological structure." Frye,
however, realizes that it "may not be explicitly known to anyone, but is nevertheless present as a shaping principle" (5). The nearest approach to such a scheme of a total mythological structure is found in encyclopaedic cultural forms, in literary works like Dante's _Commedia_ and Milton's _Paradise Lost_, and in conceptual works like St. Thomas's _Summa_. In Western Culture, the total structure has been for centuries characterized by an encyclopaedic myth derived mainly from the Bible.

Frye begins by defining this mythological structure as his theory is based on the premise that the Romantic myth is opposed to the dominant myth of the centuries preceding Romanticism. Frye points out a number of differences between the two mythological structures. The first of these is that they are based on different myths of the creation. In Pre-Romantic times, that is, from the beginning of the Christian era up to the last part of the eighteenth century, the creation myth was an "artificial" one in that it assumed "the world was made as an artefact or creature, by a divine artisan or demiurge" (6). The idea that the gods are not a part of nature and that
man should view nature as evidence for intelligent
design gave prominence to subject-object relations and
heightened the rational attitude toward the world. In
the Christian myth God, man, and nature were once
identified, but in the fall of man the harmonious
relation with nature was disturbed. Man's chief aim,
therefore, became to regain his lost identity. And
this could be achieved only through rational and social
discipline, the medium being law, morality, and
religion. Behind the entire Christian myth lies a
dichotomy in which nature is set over against human
consciousness: man is assumed to be a social rather
than a natural being; he must constantly maintain the
barrier between himself and the forces of nature, Eros
and Dionysus (5-10).

The subject-object relationship in Romanticism,
according to Frye, is of secondary importance. A
reading of Wordsworth and Coleridge reveals that "the
reason founded on a separation of consciousness from
nature is becoming inferior faculty of the
consciousness, more analytic and less constructive, the
outside of the mind dealing with the outside of nature;
determined by its field of operation, not free;
descriptive, not creative" (12). This change, Frye points out, is the first important difference between the Romantic and pre-Romantic mythological structures. In Blake's scheme of things, the god of the older paradigm was "a projected god, and idol constructed out of the sky and reflecting its mindless mechanism" (13). That is, if God exists, he exists as an aspect of man's own identity. In agreement with Blake, Frye sees this recovery of projection as the "one central element of [the] new mythological construction" (14). He says:

In the older myth God was ultimately the only active agent. God had not only created the world and man: he had also created the forms of human civilization. The traditional images of civilization are the city and the garden; the models of both were established by God before Adam was created. Law, moral principles, and, of course, the myth itself were not invented by man, but were a part of God's revelation to him. Gradually at first, in such relatively isolated thinkers as Vico, them more confidently, the conviction grows that a great deal of all this creative activity ascribed to God is projected from man, that man has created the forms of his
civilization, including his laws and his myths, and that consequently they exhibit human imperfections and are subject to human criticism. (14)

To be sure then, the Romantic aspect not only helps to form a new myth, but also to reclassify our attitude to other myths. Moreover, since the imaginative revolution of Romanticism encourages a splitting away of the scientific vision of nature from the poetic and existential vision, conceiving of mythology as a structure of the imagination changes the spirit of belief—new types of belief are possible (15-16). Two of these possibilities are singled out by Frye: "One is the revived sense of the numinous power of nature, as symbolized in Eros, Dionysus, and Mother nature herself" (16), while the second "comes from the ability that Romantic mythology conferred of being able to express a revolutionary attitude toward society, religion, and personal life" (17). The classification of the older mythology, therefore, ushers in a revolutionary change in the poet's social freedom. If the poet himself creates the forms of his civilization, then he comes a central figure who aims
not to please but to expand society's consciousness. The poet, Frye says, gains an authority of his own completely separate from the moral context of the traditional mythology (21-22) Denham, Critical Method 183).

Frye next observes that Romanticism greatly modifies the traditional schema of the four levels of reality. This "chain of being" comprises a divine world, an unfallen world of the proper or original human nature, a lower world of experience (the physical Order), and a demonic world of death. From the Anatomy we learnt that Frye considers the schema both cyclically and dialectically. The divine and the demonic worlds (heaven and hell) are eternally separated, whereas the two middle worlds describe a condition from which man fell and to which, at the end of the historical cycle, he should return. According to Frye it is still possible to think of the mythological structure of Romanticism as a scheme of four levels, but the structure as a whole is much more ambiguous and much less concretely related to the physical world (Denham 183). In Romanticism, Frye says,
What corresponds to heaven and hell is still there, the worlds of identify and alienation, but the imagery associated with them, being based on the opposition of "within" and "without" rather than of "up" and "down", is almost reversed. The identity "within", being not purely subjective but a communion, whether with nature or God, is often expressed in imagery of depth or descent. On the other hand, the sense of alienation is reinforced, if anything, by the imagery of what, since Pascal, has increasingly been felt to be the terrifying waste spaces of the heavens. (English Romanticism 46-47)

The worlds of human and physical nature do exist in Romanticism, but their relation is reverse. "In the traditional mythology, social and civilized life was necessary for man's regaining his identity, whereas in 'a great deal of romantic imagery human society is thought of as leading to alienation rather than identity'. The romantics most often appeal to the order of nature outside of society as the source for what is creative and healing" (Denham 183). Denham
concludes his observation on Frye's understanding of the chief differences between the two major mythological structures of Western culture by saying:

Frye's method of defining Romanticism is to show how three aspects of the older mythology are profoundly transformed. What emerges in the Romantic mythology is a new myth of creation, a new myth of the fall and redemption, and a new understanding of the four-tiered structure of reality. ... Frye's study ... differs from a history of ideas in that mythology for him is never simply the conceptual product of culture. Myths are originally stories, and when they are codified to form a mythology, he says, two cultural products result. One is conceptual, a body of cohering ideas; the other is fictional and metaphorical, a body of artistic patterns and conventions. Frye sees mythology ... as a combination of dianoia and mythos ... conceptually, the Romantic myth is mainly fictional, an imaginative construct, a spatial projection of reality. "For the
Frye's study of the Romantic tradition, then answers some of the basic questions he set out asking at the very outset of his career as a critic, and his emphasis on the "creative" aspect of his literary criticism expresses a tension very deep within Romanticism. While he does endeavour to set strict Arnoldeans at ease by trying to "learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world," he cannot quite ignore Blake's warning: "to generalize is to be an idiot." The very idea to a Romantic system is full of potential contradiction and Frye's most significant contribution is his demonstration that Romanticism is not a chaotic age of relativism and subjectivity or a period of contradictory tendencies which follows the breakup of the Great Chair of Being but a consistent imaginative structure in its own right.
Prye's relation to the Romantic tradition suggests, albeit partially, an answer to one to the constant questions about the literature of the twentieth century: whether modernism was in fact a new movement or simply a continuation and development of Romantic ideas. It is true that modernism is yet to be defined fully and the writing of definitive history of the movement still remains for the more ambitious. The moderns' relation to Romantic tradition is still looked upon with some scepticism, but the results of such a study cannot be totally unfruitful in developing a more comprehensive view of what modernism really is.

Although Eliot does not have a professed critical system, his criticism does contain germinal ideas about the relationships among a wide ranging catalogue of topics among belief, sensibility, and language, and these ideas are exemplified in a view of literary history which is scattered through several early essays. As literary history, or as critical commentary on myth as a literary device it is not very satisfying, but to revalue them against a frame of reference for clarification, they appear almost an essential part of his work; for, the clarification of Eliot's ideas is
only the first stage in our understanding of them. Eliot's version of literary history in itself constitutes a kind of historical myth: it is the story of Eden applied to the secular history of literature. This literary myth is an idea borrowed from the Romantics, and Eliot's use of it suggests a considerable Romantic influence in Eliot's criticism.

The present study points out some of Eliot's ideas and attempts to fill in some of the necessary background, but does not enter upon a "defense" of those ideas for, 1) Eliot's version of literary history is mythic, which assumption in itself precludes any kind of argument and 2) the tradition to which it is sought to link Eliot constitutes a defence in itself. Any concept which has appealed to minds from Aristotle to Frye has a kind of strength we must come to terms with, even if we disagree with the argument itself. Eliot is not a critic with whom one can agree all the time; nevertheless, it has been my purpose to show that the sense of myth is an essential part of Eliot's criticism in that we cannot see the shape of the whole without it. It should not be a case of "misreading" or any overt "anxiety of influence" as Harold Bloom is
wont to suggest. Bloom believes that the act of misreading is inevitable. He has worked out a theoretical paradigm where he has reduced the history of modern poetry, and hence criticism, to a single theme—the struggle of poets/critics against their 'fathers'. As Denis Donoghue observes, much of Bloom's hostility to Eliot can be traced to the fact that Eliot does not fit Bloom's paradigm: "Eliot is weak, presumably, because his relation to Dante was not a Freudian struggle of son against father; it was based upon Eliot's feeling that 'there is no competition'" ("Stevens at the Crossing" 40). Similarly, using Donoghue's observation, we can counter Bloom by noting that the question of Eliot's influence upon Frye is essentially a side-issue. While we have admitted that Frye used some of the ideas of the earlier poet-critic in formulating his own ideas, the real similarity lies not in any supposed borrowings, but rather, in the common perception of an issue or problem and the attempt to come to terms with it imaginatively.

Frye's doctrine of the imagination forms the major determinant in his critical theory, and this in itself distinguishes his poetics from the dualistic
approach of Eliot. Frye, we noted, shares a common starting point with the Romantic theorists whereas Eliot's own attacks on Romanticism and the romantic sensibility evade such a link. But behind the smoke-screen Eliot shares in another aspect of the Romantic sensibility—the tendency to look back to a source of value, the search for a tradition, in the same way that Blake sought a lost innocence of Vision, Wordsworth a lost unity with the natural world. The golden age of art is always somewhere in the past, a lost Eden, like the age of unified sensibility, which the critics hope to revive. This common thread of thought is at the centre of both Eliot's and Frye's criticism. While it might be a fallacy to consider the idea of the golden age as central to the thought of non-romantic ages, it is safe, perhaps to assume that it is one of the defining features of Romanticism.

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