CHAPTER III

THE IMAGINATION AS CRITICAL SANCTION

I. THE WORLD AS IMAGINATIVE VISION

Frye notes with regret the apparent banality with which Eliot regards imagination as a critical mode. He says:

A curious, and to me regrettable, feature of Eliot's critical theory is his avoidance of the term "Imagination," except in the phrase "auditory imagination" at the furthest remove from the poetic product. The poet has an image-forming power, and his "philosophy" or body of "ideas" is arrived at by studying the conceptual implications of the structure of his images. Thus Yeats writes an essay called "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," which is actually an essay on Shelley's imagery. This seems to me a much more valid critical procedure than talking about the poetry and the ideas of a poet as though they were separable things, separable enough even for a poet to "borrow" his philosophy from somebody else. Eliot's myth of decline constrasts
Dante, who "had behind him the system of St. Thomas, to which his poem corresponds point to point," with Blake and Goethe and Shelley, who mistakenly invested their own philosophies. Blake's genius required, we are told, "a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own." But when we read *Four Quartets*, whatever influences there may be from Bradley or Patanjali or St. John of the Cross or Heraclitus, we darkly suspect Eliot too of indulging in a philosophy of his own. (T.S. Eliot 48-49)

Eliot, at times, does seem to contradict his theory of impersonality. We are told that "we all have to choose whatever subject matter affords us the deepest and most secret release," and that art has a "cathartic" effect on the author's most personal suffering (Hyman 104). And there are times when Eliot speaks of "personal and private agonies" which the poet must transform "into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal" (Selected Essays 137). Eliot appears to be unaware that the emotions expressed in the above passages might be experienced only in imagination. At
other times he is more honest. In praising St. John Perse and his prose poetry he sees the poetic as the "logic of imagination" ("Preface," Anabasis 7-11), and quotes Coleridge's description of imagination as reconciling opposites as a justification of metaphysical wit where Marvell is admired for possessing "wit which is fused into the imagination" (Selected Essays 282).

While Eliot had earlier advocated the cause for the autonomy of art, the "integrity of poetry," he later came to realize a double standard in criticism: artistic on one place and moral-philosophical-theological on the other.

In ages like our own . . . it is the more necessary . . . to scrutinize . . . works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards. ("Religion and Literature" 97)
The above passage assigns to literary criticism a somewhat sketchy dichotomy between art and non-art, for it leaves the major issues like "greatness," or the act of "validating"—which Eliot calls "aesthetic sanction" for thought—to moral and theological consideration.

Frye, as it can be seen from the Tentative Conclusion to the Anatomy, neither endorses the view that criticism is finally autonomous nor accepts the idea that literature is aesthetically self-contained. Frye's case for the autonomy of criticism, though somewhat overstated in the Polemical Introduction, makes his central intent clear; to caution against using literature for the purpose of documenting some sociological, religious, or psychological thesis. The issue for him is not that criticism is prevented from appropriating terminology or concepts from intellectual developments outside its own field, it is rather the use to which these borrowings are put within a particular critical frame of reference. He also says that it is necessary to "realize that criticism has a variety of neighbours, and that the critics must enter into relations with them in any way that guarantees his (sic) own independence" (Anatomy 10). Frye's frame of
reference is contextual. He is interested in looking at literature primarily as a non-intentional form of writing, and in such a framework it is easier to view literature as being self-contained. However, Frye himself leans on a number of other disciplines for his own conceptual constructs. He speaks of the necessity of critics becoming "more aware of the external relations of criticism as a whole with other disciplines" (324), of the "revolutionary Act of consciousness" involved in the response to literature (344), and of the obligation of criticism to recover the social function of art (345). "It seems to me," he says, "that it would be an excess of prudence, in fact hardly honest, to shrink altogether from the larger issues" (342-343). The "larger issues" are what Frye confronts and tries to provide a number of alternatives the critic might choose from: rejecting some and adapting others to his Romantic view of the imagination.

As a beginning first principle Frye wants to suggest that each of the four kinds of criticism in the Anatomy--historical, ethical, archetypal, and rhetorical--is related to a wider area of humanistic
concern, where he feels the immediate effect of the humanistic tradition, in its modern form, "was not to stimulate new culture so much as to codify the heritage of the past" (344), but the recreation of the past in a new context. This is not entirely unlike Eliot's belief in tradition, for while Eliot's traditionalism causes him to deny the poet a role in creating new beliefs, it may also be the other way around. "The preoccupation of the humanities with the past," Frye says, is sometimes made a reproach against them by those who forget that we face the past: it may be shadowy, but it is all that there is. Plato draws a gloomy picture of man staring at the flickering shapes made on the wall of the objective world by a fire behind us like the sun. But the analogy breaks down when the shadows are those of the past, for the only light we can see them by is the Promethean fire within us. The substance of these shadows can only be in ourselves, and the goal of historical criticism, as our metaphors about it often indicate, is a kind of self-
resurrection, the vision of a valley of dry bones that takes on the flesh and blood of our vision. The culture of the past is not only the memory of mankind, but our own buried life, and study of it leads to a recognition scene, a discovery in which we see, not our past lives, but the total cultural form of our present life. It is not only the poet but his reader who is subject to the obligation to "make it new." (345-46)

Such a view, Frye claims, can lead to an expansion of our imaginative perspective in the present - a view anticipated in the Polemical Introduction where he says that we study literature "as we do the stars, seeing their interrelationships but not approaching them" (24). He put it this way at the end of The Well Tempered Critic:

Literature, we say, neither reflects nor escapes from ordinary life: what it does reflect is the world as human imagination conceives it, in mythical, romantic, heroic and ironic as well as realistic and fantastic terms. This world is the universe in human form, stretching from the complete fulfillment of human desire to what human desire utterly repudiates, the quo tendas—that is, "Where you should be going" vision of reality that elsewhere I have called, for reasons rooted in
my study of Blake, apocalyptic ... Some religions assume that such a world exists, though only for gods; other religions, including those closer to us, identify it with a world man enters at death, the extremes of desire becoming its heavens and hells: revolutionary philosophies associate it with what man is to gain in the future; mystics call it the world of total or cosmic consciousness. A poet may accept any of these indentifications without damage to his poetry; but for the world man exists and participates in through his imagination, it is the world in which our imaginations move and have their being while we are also living in the "real" world, where our imaginations find the ideals that they try to pass on to belief and action, where they find the vision which is the source of both the dignity and the joy of life. (155-156)

This, however, does not mean that the critic should use art to support social or political causes, for, criticism can never be based on these tenets. "As soon as we make culture a definite image; of a future and
perhaps attainable society, we start selecting and purging a tradition, and all the artists who don't fit (an increasing number as the process goes on) have to be thrown out" (Anatomy 346).

From a rejection of a historic sense based on a blind reverence for the archaic and an ethical approach which could lead to a futurism based on indoctrination, Frye is led to reconsider the implications of ethical criticism resulting from an assumption that art in its archetypal aspect is an ethical instrument. In the Tentative Conclusion he says:

The ethical purpose of a liberal education is to liberate, which can only mean to make one capable of conceiving society as free, classless, and urbane. No such society exists, which is one reason why a liberal education must be deeply concerned with works of imagination. The imaginative element in works of art, again, lifts them clear of the bondage of history. Anything that emerges from the total experience of criticism to form a part of liberal education becomes, by virtue of that fact, part of the emancipated and humane community of culture, whatever its
original reference. Thus liberal education liberates the works of culture themselves as well as the mind they educate. The corruption out of which human art has been constructed will always remain in the art, but the imaginative quality of the art preserves it in its corruption. (347-48).

The two obvious frames of reference here are those of imagination and society, but Frye does not reconcile himself to accepting either as an ultimate norm. He argues that if society becomes the governing criterion of criticism, then art becomes subordinated to morality or one of the practical sciences, and the sought imaginative vision is lost. And on the other hand, if the aesthetic norm is given prominence, the social junction of criticism is vitiated. "We tried to show," he says, "that the moment we go from the individual work of art to the sense of the total form of the art, the art becomes no longer an object of aesthetic contemplation but an ethical instrument, participating in the world of civilization. In this shift to the ethical, criticism as well as poetry is involved" (349).
In *The Critical Path* Frye implies that the process of interpreting the social myths of culture is "very similar to criticism in literature" and that "different forms of critical interpretation cannot be sharply separated, whether they are applied to the plays of Shakespeare, the manuscripts of the Bible, the American Constitution, or the oral traditions of an aboriginal tribe. In the area of general concern they converge, however widely the technical contexts in law, theology, literature or anthropology may differ" (123). An appeal is made here to archetypal criticism to mediate, on the plea that while the literary critic is not equipped to deal with all the "technical contexts" of culture, the archetypal critic is more prepared to interpret the cultural phenomena that form the social environment of literature. He says:

The modern critic is a student of mythology, and his total subject embraces not merely literature, but the areas of concern which the mythical language of construction and belief enters and informs. These areas constitute the mythological subjects, and they include large parts of religion, philosophy, political theory, and the social sciences. (98).
However much the emphasis on the principle of autonomy may be in the Polemical Introduction to the Anatomy, Frye's conception of criticism is always expansive enough to include the dialectically opposite emphasis: the moral and social reference of criticism and the centrifugal aspect of literary meaning. As Robert Denham observes in his "Introduction" to Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature, "Each of the four types of criticism in the Anatomy is continually qualified or corrected by the succeeding type, the result being a breadth of reference which permits Frye to discuss literature in both its poetic and its more-than-poetic contexts, both of which are ultimately subsumed under the most expansive of all his critical categories, the visionary imagination" (12).
II. CONCERN AND DETACHMENT

While Frye's system never lapses into dualisms that conveniently separate artistic from extra-artistic views of reality, his consideration of literature and life rests on two contrasting approaches to experience—the approaches of concern and detachment. In his writings after *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye has been increasingly concerned with the importance of defining literature and relating it to life, and to plead a case for educating the imagination through a study of literary works. In his scheme of representation, reality, when viewed with detachment (or from the objective perspective which Frye terms "reason," "recognition," or "sense") appears as a morally neutral, non-human environment comprising of calculable "yardstick space" and the meaningless succession of "clockwork time." Thus he can treat a wide range of topics as the difference between oral and writing cultures, Renaissance humanism, the critical theories of Sidney and Shelley, Marxism and Democracy, the idea of progress, advertising and propaganda, McLuhanism, theories of education, social contract theories and conceptions of Utopia, and others as more-or-less related subjects set against the background of
what he sees as the two opposing myths—the myth of concern and the myth of freedom (detachment).

The myth of concern is all inclusive and incorporates everything that a society is most concerned to know. It is an expression of human desire which leads man to uphold communal, rather than individual, values. It exists, to hold society together. . . . For it, truth and reality are not directly connected with reasoning or evidence, but are socially established. What is true, for concern, is what society does and believes in response to authority, and a belief, so far as a belief is verbalized, is a statement of willingness to participate in a myth of concern. The typical language of concern therefore tends to become the language of belief. (CP 36)

A myth of concern originates in oral or preliterate culture and has its roots in religion. It is associated with verse conventions and discontinuous prose forms, and it is "deeply attached to ritual, to coronations, weddings, funerals, parades,
demonstrations, where something is publicly done that expresses an inner social identity" (45). It only later branches out into politics, law, and literature. Concern, for Frye, is the union of human being and reality; the sense that what is out there correlates with the motional and intellectual forms through which man encounters reality. Thus when myths of concern crumble, one is left not with a new scientific world view, but with the chaos of a social world which no longer seems to satisfy human desires.

The myth of freedom, on the other hand, is the verbal expression of man's attention to "truths and realities which are studied rather than created." When operating through myths of freedom the mind presents itself as a stable, impersonal, consciousness imaging, and dealing with an objective spatialized world. Frye uses the term "freedom" because such thinking always seeks unrestrained opportunities for experiment and analysis; it has confidence in the rational nature of reality and in man's ability to control what he discovers. It appeals, therefore, to such self-validating criteria as "logicality of argument of (usually a later stage) impersonal evidence and
verification." It is inherently "liberal," helping to foster such values as objectivity, detachment, suspension of judgement, tolerance and respect for the individual. It "stresses the importance of the non-mythical elements in culture, of the truth and realities that are studied rather than created, provided by nature rather than by social vision" (44). It originates in the mental habits of a literary culture, which with its continuous prose and discontinuous verse forms, brings into society. In relation to what we see with detachment, our attitude is one of passive acceptance, indifference and separation. We scientifically study and practically adjust to what exists outside ourselves, but we do not creatively bring into being the values and qualities that objectively are not there.

In its attempt to deal scientifically with myths of concern, literary criticism is subject to the two basic vices Frye finds as demonic versions of human intellectual activity. It can fall into the vice of detachment by taking its obligations of disinterest and objective completeness as its only goals where the vice of detachment is an intellectual embodiment of the
ironic vision, and where it sees the world devoid of human meaning and impossible to reconstruct in terms of desire. To succumb to this vice is to deny one's identity as a social being who participates in myths of concern and uses them whether or not he takes conscious appraisal of the fact.

The other vice, arising from too complete an involvement in specific myths of concern, Frye calls "anxiety"—the desire to have all reality safely and completely ensconced in a single myth of concern. The vice of anxiety embodies in social form the pattern of tragedy which presents the human potential gradually becoming enmeshed in forms of ritual bondage. Anxiety, Frye tells us, is a chronic danger for those most committed to communal ideals. In the politician it manifests itself as the totalitarian desire for all facts and opinions to support a single world view, while in the artist, anxiety appears usually as the conservative desire to structure new realities in terms of old myths. Anxiety may in fact be most pernicious in literary criticism where, under the pretence of the necessity of value judgements, they tend to mislead the critic from the disinterested analysis which can
free a text from tendencies toward stock response. Value judgements of specific texts are almost always seen in terms of specific myths of social concern and tend to reduce the text in terms of those myths. Mythology and literature are related because the same forces that construct myths—imagination, desire and concern—are also the forces that create literary works. In a similar process by which mythology assimilates rather than simply imitates nature, literature too imposes its own forms onto reality. As Frye often points out, "literary shape cannot come from life" nor can it be duplicated from "any observation of human life or behaviour" (Fables 36). He stresses:

It is hardly possible to accept a critical view which confuses the original with the aboriginal, and images that a "creative" poet sits down with a pencil and some blank paper and eventually produces a new poem in a special act of creation ex nihilo. Human beings do not create in that way. Just as a new scientific discovery manifests something that was already latent in the order of nature, and at the same time is logically
related to the total structure of the existing science, so the new poem manifests something that was already latent in the order of words. Literature may have life, reality, experience, nature, imaginative truth, social conditions, or what you will for its content; but literature itself is not made out of these things. Poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself, and it not shaped externally: the forms of literature can no more exist outside literature than the forms of sonata and fugue and rondo can exist outside music. (Anatomy 97)

Literature, like mythology, "is not shaped externally;" for literary works "the standard of reality does not inhere in what is there, but in an unreal and subjective excess over what is there which then comes into being with its own kind of reality" (Fables 151). In its ultimate phase—which Frye terms "anagogic"—literature comprises a universe of words that continually expands to "swallow" or possess reality—like Andre Malraux's Le Musse Imaginaire—and thus to
constitute the outward circumference of man's ever-expansive desire. In the "anagogic phase," Literature, like a language, is:

- a body of hypothetical thought and actions; it makes, as literature, no statements or assertions. It neither reflects nor escapes from the world of belief and action, but contains it in its own distinctive form. It is this independence from real experience which the 'imagination' expresses, a term which includes both intellect and emotion, and yet is different from actual truth or real feeling. (WTC 149 see also Fables 21d).

Frye, would, however, correct us that "Nobody can believe in any such universe," but this is only to suggest that "literature is not religion, and it does not address itself to belief":

The writer is neither a watcher nor a dreamer. Literature does not reflect life, but it doesn't escape or withdraw from life either: it swallows it. And the imagination won't stop until it's swallowed everything. (The Educated Imagination 80-81)
If science expresses the valuelessness learned through detachment, mythology is the basic expression of concerned vision and imaginative desire. Myths creatively humanize rather than passively imitate reality, thus taking into account emotional dissatisfactions stemming from an alienation from the objective world. Myths, therefore, refer to a human and emotionally desirable world which Frye refers to as "reality." Referring to "the real world" he says: "The real world, that is, the human world, has constantly to be created, and the one model on which we must not create it is that of the world out there. The world out there has no human values, hence we should think of it primarily not as real but as absurd" (Stubborn Structure 51). To desire the correspondence of myths to the "world out there is to fall prey to the vice of anxiety--the "refusal to accept the fact that man continually creates his world anew" (54). Beyond Frye's formulation of the myths can be seen the Romantic-idealist vision of the conflict between the authenticity of spirit, or imagination, or nature, and the poverty of the existential situation where this potential is hidden (Altieri 964-75).
The manner in which Frye uses the concepts of freedom and concern practically is seen in his treatment of Sidney's and Shelley's defenses of poetry. He places Sidney's view of poetry against the background of Renaissance humanism and concludes "that Sidney accommodates the role of the poet to the values of a reading and writing culture, to the norms of meaning established by writers of discursive prose" (Denham, "Introduction" 15). He says, "the conception of poetry in Sidney is an application of the general humanist view of disciplined speech as the manifestation or audible presence of social authority" (Critical Path 66), and since, "what is most distinctive about poetry is the poet's power of illustration, a power which is partially an ability to popularize and make more accessible the truths of revelation and reasons" (67). What actually occurs in Sidney's theory is that the original characteristics of the myths of freedom and concern are interchanged. "The myth of concern," Frye adds, "takes on a reasoning aspect, claiming the support of logic and historical evidence; the myth of freedom becomes literary and imaginative, as the poet, excluded from primary authority in the myth of concern, finds his social
function in a complementary activity, which (not only) liberalizes concern but also . . . reinforces" (75).

In classical criticism the writer departs from nature and history to imitate rather than invent an intelligible order—an external model of imitation known through reason that controls the artist's productions. These are consequently more philosophical, as well as more imaginative, than the factual reports of the historian. And for a critic like Frye, it must be remembered, the poet "has no external model of imitation," and, where his work swallows, rather than reflects the world rationally studied by the detached watcher. Frye's efforts to differentiate the writer from the "watcher" may be seen here as a corollary to basic tenets of Romantic and post-Romantic theory. Frye's sympathies, therefore, should naturally lie on the side of Shelley. Moreover, they both believe that the language of literature represents the imaginative possibilities of concern.

On Shelley's defence, Frye would have us return to a conception of poetry which is as mythical and psychologically primitive. He argues:
Shelley begins by neatly inverting the hierarchy of values assumed in Sidney. Shelley puts all the discursive disciplines into an inferior group of "analytic" operations of reason. They are aggressive; they think of ideas as weapons; they seek the irrefutable argument, which keeps eluding them because all arguments are theses, and theses are half-truths implying their own opposites. Some of the discursive writers are defenders of the social status quo. There are also liberal and radical discursive writers; they are on Shelley's side and he approves of them. The works of imagination, by contrast, cannot be refuted; poetry is the dialectic of love, which treats everything it encounters as another form of itself, and never attacks, only includes. Thus there appears in Shelley, as in his predecessors, the conception of a model world above the existing world. This model world for him, however, is associated not with the Christian unfallen world, nor even with the Classical Golden Age, in spite of some
allusions to the latter in the Defence, but rather with the higher reason, Vernunft as distinct from Verstand, which so many Romantics identified with the imagination.

This argument assumes, not only that the language of poetry is mythical, but that poetry, in its totality, is in fact society's real myth of concern, and that the poet is still the lawgiver of civilization, as in ancient time. . . . There is a reality out there . . . and there is the reality which does not exist to begin with, but is brought into being through a certain kind of creative activity. The metaphor of creation . . . is not new with the Romantics . . . . But in Sidney's day it was accepted that the models of creation were established by God: for Shelley, man makes his own civilization, and at the centre of man's creation are the poets, whose work provides the models of human society. The myths of poetry embody and express man's creation of his own culture, rather than his reception of it from a divine source. (Critical Path 94, 95-96).
To say that literature contains the imaginative possibilities of concern is to say that it displays "the total range of verbal fictions and models and images and metaphors out of which all myths of concern are constructed" (98). There are times, however, when Frye seems to share Coleridge's conviction that by virtue of its "independence from real experience" and the claims of the scientific understanding, the poet's vision has access to a human world which has a greater "reality" than the world "out there." Yet, like Matthew Arnold, I.A. Richards and T. S. Eliot, Frye does not claim that the poet's creations are true.

They assert, on the one hand, the need for a separation between ideas and poetry and, on the other hand, the need for a fusion and unity in the poet's work. ... Frye seems to resolve this difficulty ... by overcoming the extra-poetic character of ideas. ... (He) can accomplish this ... only by broadening poetry until it encompasses ideas. ... Still, as the shaping of nature to human ends, ideas becomes poetry, become coextensive with poetry. The cost to poetry in this broadened sense is that it now is no
longer limited to poems. It characterizes, not uniquely fashioned works with their specially manipulated medium, but all symbolic projections of human vision. . . . By elevating poetry to vision itself, Frye may seem to have freed it from the earthly burden of mere discourse. . . . Frye has pursued this liberation of the human dream more extremely. The stubborn, intransigent reality that goes its way in indifference to us must be abandoned by imagination for the forms of human desire, the world as we choose to have it, as we must have it if we are to preserve our humanity. (Krieger, "Critical Legacy" 473).

Thus, far from ironically eschewing literature's importance to life, the imagination's departures from external reality are the main criteria in establishing literature's social and moral uses.

Frye can therefore opinionate that, "our imagination is what our whole social life is really based on," because through the imagination we create and envision the "real society" to which we all owe our loyalty. This "real society" which Frye compares to
Arnold's culture, is a literary creation which functions as an imagined "reservoir of possibilities" and which, both, reflects and refutes reality. The world which we know through imagination gives us the critical perspective we need to view society from—as a "repressive anxiety-structure" or "an anti-art, an old and worn-out creation that needs to be created anew" (Modern Century 86). And "the crux of the critic's problem is in his attitude to what we have been calling the model world, and which we should now call the imaginative world" (Critical Path 100).

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III. IMAGINATION AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Through the possession of literature, Frye urges us to believe in *The Well-Tempered Critic*, we enter "genuine society," or rather, "the world in which our imaginations move and have their being while we are also living in the 'real world, where our imaginations find the ideals that they try to pass on to belief and action, where they find the vision which is the source of both dignity and the joy of life" (156). And in the Tentative Conclusion to the *Anatomy* he initiates the cause for a classless civilization based on a liberal education deeply concerned with works of imagination. "The imaginative element in works of art . . . lifts them clear of the bondage of history. Anything that emerges from the total experience of criticism to form a part of liberal education becomes, by virtue of that fact, part of the emancipated and humane community of culture, whatever its original reference" (347). The world which we know through imagination provides the critical perspective from which we can view society in its natural order; and without imaginative vision, it would seem then, people and societies perish, for according to Frye we live "in 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).

These statements appear to have a tone of finility about them, yet they are only illustrative of Frye's major concern to establish an autonomous conceptual universe, while ensuring at the same time that this universe is not isolated from culture, society, and humane letters. "I am not wholly unaware," he says at one point, "that at every step of this argument there are extremely complicated philosophical problems which I am incompetent to solve as such" (Anatomy 350). But by his own admission, his view of literature's importance to society is an adjunct to the thinking of Romantic and post-Romantic critics who believed, like Shelley, that poets were also "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Frye's system, however, conceives of criticism as a dialectical axis, having "as one pole the total acceptance of the data of literature, and as the other the total acceptance of the potential value of those data" (25). This twin approach allows him to
brook any critical problems according to whether he looks upon it in a centrifugal or centripetal manner. In the Anatomy we find that he is mainly concerned with the centripetal aspect of literature, that is, the inward gaze toward the structure of literature itself, but a number of his other works, as is also evident from their titles, deals with the centrifugal aspect or directed outward toward the social context of literature. Significant, however, in Frye's approach is the fact that he endorses the social and moral usefulness of poetry for essentially Romantic reasons. In his study of Wallace Stevens, Frye says:

Any discussion of poetry has to begin with the field or area that it works in, the field described by Aristotle as nature. Stevens calls it "reality," by which he means, not simply the external physical world, but "things as they are," the existential process that includes ordinary human life on the level of absorption in routine activity. Human intelligence can resist routine by arresting it in an act of consciousness, but the normal tendency of routine is to work against consciousness. The revolution of consciousness against routine is the starting point of all
mental activity, and the centre of mental activity is imagination, the power of transforming "reality" into awareness of reality. Man can have no freedom except what begins in his own awareness of his condition. ("The Realistic Oriole" 353-370)

In his opinion we create our real society—the sanction of "the kind of standards and values we need"—through imaginative vision. "Our imagination is what our whole social life is really based on" because through the imagination we create and envision the real society to which we all owe our loyalty.

This "real society," which betrays an Arnoldian awareness of culture, is a literary creation. Frye acknowledges his indebtedness to Arnold when he says that "it seems clear that Arnold was on solid ground when he made 'culture,' a total imaginative vision of life with literature at its center, the regulating and normalizing element in social life, the human source, at least, of spiritual authority" (WTC 154). Arnold therefore can be seen as the shaping spirit authorizing Frye when he says that,
seeing literature as a unity in itself does not withdraw it from a social context: on the contrary, it becomes far easier to see what its place in civilization is. Criticism will always have two aspects, one towards the structure of literature and one turned toward the other cultural phenomena that form the social environment of literature. Together they balance each other: when one is worked on the exclusion of the other, the critical perspective goes out of focus. If criticism is in proper balance, the tendency of critics to move from critical to larger social issues becomes more intelligible. Such a movement need not, and should not, be due to a dissatisfaction with the narrowness of criticism as a discipline, but should be simply the result of a sense of social context, a sense present in all critics. (Critical Path 24-25)

The above passage from the Critical Path stresses the point Frye makes in the Conclusion to the Anatomy. And the same concern is shared in later works like The
Modern Century and The Stubborn Structure. Frye is not merely concerned with the "disinterested study of literary structure," but is largely involved in the making of literature, as Donald Riccomini observes:

The similarity between Frye and the Structuralists . . . extends to the function of the artist. For both systems the text is not so much the expression of the individual as it is something actualized by the individual (or the artist) in whom the potential for performing the text lies dormant. Frye's view on this matter derives from his adherence to T.S. Eliot's famous dictum that "the existing monuments of literature form an ideal order among themselves, and are not simply collections of the writing of individuals." If there is such an autonomous order of words then, Frye assumes, there must be laws governing their order; and when the artist creates, he is not so much expressing his personal views (though he could be) as he is transforming those laws so as to accommodate the demands for
versimilitude of his time. ("Northrop Frye and Structuralism" 33-47).

This is as much as what Shelley would have us believe when he said that, we consequently "want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know"; and as Frye says, "the growth of knowledge cannot itself provide us with the social vision which will suggest what we should do with our knowledge" (Critical Path 110).

Frye's attempt at separating morally valuable imaginative vision from ethically inadequate rational knowledge gives rise to two questions: (1) Can "Social vision" do without rational knowledge? (2) What kind of social and moral guidance can we obtain from literature? The answer to these questions lie in the awareness of how we are to use literature in our actual formulation of specific myths of concern. In his Presidential Address at the Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association, 1976, Frye, in effect, provides the answer to the above when he said:

The older humanist philosophy did distinguish knowledge and wisdom, but it assumed that knowledge was the only possible road to
wisdom. Knowledge for it was knowledge of the actual: wisdom was rather a sense of the potential, the ability, developed out of knowledge, to adapt to a variety of situations. . . . Knowledge is secret and elitist by its very nature: what it really leads to is a mysterious expertise; and this, so far from broadening the social perspective tends to narrow it. Such a narrowing . . . is at best pedantry, at worst an indifference to the real issues of our time, issues involving not only the well-being but even the continued existence of the human race, that verges on the psychotic. There has always been a different conception of wisdom, the conception preserved in the popular proverbs and fables that, from ancient times, have been among the few really democratic literary genres. This wisdom consists in the possession, by the community as a whole, of the essential axioms for sanity and survival. ("Presidential Address 1976," PMLA 92 (1977) 385-91)

And an answer to Frye's ideological assumption about the nature of literature lies in his account of myth
and fable in The Secular Scripture:

Every human society, we may assume, has some form of verbal culture, in which fictions, or stories, have a prominent place. Some of these stories may seem more important than others: they illustrate what primarily concerns their society. They help to explain certain features in that society's religion, laws, social structure, environment, history or cosmology. Other stories seem to be less important, and of some at least of these stories we say that they are told to entertain or amuse. This means that they are told to meet the imaginative needs of the community so far as structures in words can meet those needs. The more important stories are also imaginative, but incidentally so: They are intended to convey something more like special knowledge, something of what in religion is called revelation. Hence they are not thought of as imaginative or even of human origin, for a long time. (6-7)

Though structurally identical, myth and folktale are
distinguished by their function. Myths "are intended to convey something more like special knowledge," but,

Given a slightly different direction of social development . . . a body of legend might easily . . . become mythical . . . . Myths stick together because of cultural forces impelling them to do so: these forces are not primarily literary, and mythologies are mainly accepted as structures of belief or social concern rather than imagination . . . . And since folktales possess the same kind of structure they can stick together too.

(11-12)

As a result, Frye can "look at fiction as a total verbal order, with the outlines of an imaginative universe also in it" (15).

Frye chooses for his example the Christian vision, for Christianity possesses "a body of true myth or revelation, most of it in the Bible" (19). He says:

The Bible is the supreme example of the way that myths can, under certain social pressures, stick together to make up a
mythology. A second look at this mythology shows us that it actually became, for medieval and latter centuries, a vast mythological universe, stretching in time from creation to apocalypse, and in metaphorical space from heaven to hell. A mythological universe is a vision of reality in terms of human concerns and hopes and anxieties. Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, man first acquires a mythological universe and then pretends as long as he can that it is also the actual universe. All mythological universes are by definition centered on man, therefore the actual universe was also assumed to be centered on man. (14).

By speculating on the "the total verbal order" of fiction as a displacement of the mythological order comprising the Christian vision, Frye manages to retain for his system an authority based on an oracular of theological origin much the same as Eliot did for his. The scripture of fiction may be secularized, but it all-the-same remains linked to the Sacred Scripture and, therefore, must be analogous to the central event or monad of Christianity--the Incarnation. And just as
the Incarnation is a continuous creative act, similarly
the monad is omnipresent, an animating, logocentric
centre of creation. By isolating the Christian myth
as the model for his criticism, Frye may be said to
benefit from the authority of an ideology that
reconciles both time and the timeless. In this way he
succeeds in uniting diachrony—the existence of the
text in time—with synchrony—the existence of the
textual infrastructure in the world of ideas.

In the final analysis then, Frye does not see
"detachment" and "concern" to refer to his familiar
terms, as contradictory at all. He sees them simply as
contrary, that is, as different in emphasis and
direction. In fact it is the merging of freedom and
concern that produces the social context of
literature. For Frye, the imaginative possibilities of
concern contained in literature displays "the total
range of verbal fictions and models and images and
metaphors out of which all myths of concern are
constructed" (Critical Path 98), and since his "view
of poetry takes us back to the areas of concern
expressed in primitive and oracular mythology, the
critic's approach to the values expressed by a myth of
concern must derive from the myth of freedom" (Denham,
"Introduction" 16). Frye qualifies the autonomy of the creative imagination and attempts to bring together dialectically what his theory has tried to separate. "The critic qua critic," according to him, "is not himself concerned but detached" (Critical Path 99).

Thus, the realities which we know through detached reasoning enter into literary vision, and the writer cannot turn his back entirely to the realities known through reason. To be sure, any imaginatively chosen "myth of concern" exists in a dialectical tension with the "myth of freedom":

The basis of all tolerance in society, the condition in which a plurality of concerns co-exist, is the recognition of the tension between concern and freedom. . . . Human society, in the present as in the past, is an objective fact. . . . Therefore, the scientific spirit and the search for truth of correspondence will invade the structures of concern themselves, studying human mythology in the same spirit that they study nature. This collision between concern and freedom may well be the most important kind of what is now
called "culture shock" that we have. . . .

(And since) concern and freedom both occupy the whole of the same universe: they interpenetrate, and it is no good trying to set up boundary stones. Some, of course, meet the collision of concern and freedom from the opposite side, with a naive rationalism which expects that before long all myths of concern will be outgrown and only the appeal to reason and evidence and experiment will be taken seriously. . . . I consider such a view entirely impossible. The growth of non-mythical knowledge tends to eliminate the incredible from belief, and helps to shape the myth of concern according to the outlines of what experience finds possible and vision desirable. But the growth of knowledge cannot in itself provide us with the social vision which will suggest what we should do with our knowledge. (108-10)

For Frye, however, we did note, literature is not simply one of many codes, but a special type of language—a "total verbal order"—by which he can say
that the "verbal expression of concern" is the myth of freedom," but is "a part that stresses the importance of the non-mythical elements in culture, of the truths and realities that are studied rather than created, provided by nature rather than by a social vision" (44). And as to how we can consequently arrive at such an order, Frye says,

we must come to terms with the fact that mythical and logical languages are distinct. The vision of things as they could or should be certainly has to depend on the vision of things as they are. But what is between them is not so much a point of contact as an existential gap, a revolutionary and transforming act of choice. The beliefs we hold and the kind of society we try to construct are chosen from infinite possibilities, and the notion that our choices are inevitably connected with things as they are, whether through the mind of God or the constitution of nature, always turns out to be an illusion of habit. (104-05)

It is reality, finally, which conditions
imaginative desire and "social vision" is dependent on "the vision of things as they are." Here, then, lies the relevance of the social function of criticism for the literary critic. Frye's ideal critic is prepared to see that myths of concern in society are like those in literature in that they represent the range of imaginative possibilities of belief. The assumption that the imagination resists rather than accedes to the limits of reason lends support to the view of literature as a reservoir of infinite possibilities. These possibilities are infinite because for the autonomous imagination everything is literally possible and not confined within the boundaries of the objective world. Commenting on the Kierkegaardian Either/Or position, Frye says:

If we stop with the voluntary self-blinkering of commitment, we are no better off than the "aesthetic": on the other side of "or" is another step to be taken, a step from the committed to the creative, from iconoclastic concern to what the literary critic above all ought to be able to see, that in literature man is a spectator of his own life, or at
least of the larger vision in which his life is contained. This vision is nothing external to himself and is not born out of nature or any objective environment. Yet it is not subjective either, because it is produced by the power of imaginative communication, the power that enables men, in Aristotle's phrase, not merely to come together to form a social life, but to remain together to form the good life. (129).

In the final analysis of literature's moral and social value Frye leaves us with a disturbing paradox. Any chosen myth of concern is as imaginatively possible and as rationally indefensible as any other. The act of choice can look neither to objective reality nor to the imagination for genuine ratification and support. Frye concludes that,

It is out of the tension between concern and freedom that glimpses of a third order of experience emerge, of a world that may not exist but complete existence, the world of the definite experience that poetry urges us
to have but which we never quite get. If such a world existed, no individual could live in it, because the society he belongs to is part of himself. . . . If we could live in it, of course, criticism would cease and the distinction between literature and life would disappear, because life itself would then be the continuous incarnation of the creative word. (170-71)
IV. FRYE'S THEORY OF POETIC IMAGINATION

Frye's answer as to how man can be both detached and attached to the community of concern, we noted, lies in the visionary imagination since only in the world of imagination can the tension between freedom and concern be properly maintained. The myths of concern and detachment which Frye speaks of regarding the social context of literary criticism in The Critical Path are the same values that he begins with in the Anatomy of Criticism. In the Anatomy, we observe that Frye seeks to hold in tension an ethical or social criticism which reaches out toward the myth of concern, with a detached and disinterested criticism of literary structure, which makes him admit: "The critic qua critic is not himself concerned but detached" (Critical Path 99). And the ideal critic is one who is prepared to see that myths of concern in society are like those in literature in that they represent a range of imaginative possibilities.

Frye's doctrine of the imagination forms the major determinant in his critical theory. This in itself distinguishes his poetics from "The dualistic
approach of Eliot, who so often speaks of poetry as though it were an emotional and sensational soul looking for a 'correlative' skeleton of thought to be provided by a philosopher, a Cartesian ghost trying to find a machine that will fit" ("Realistic Oriole" 353). But for Prye, the imagination can be conceived of as an infinite number of moral and political possibilities because for him no external beliefs bind its vision, and such external realities validate none of the myths of concern whereas the imagination legitimizes all of them.

In his doctrine of the imagination, Prye shares a common starting point with the Romantic theorists, that is, a sense that ethical values and imaginative vision lie beyond the scope of rational knowledge. This relation with the Romantic critical tradition is rooted in Prye's study of Blake. He admits in "The Road of Excess" that,

My first sustained effort in scholarship was an attempt to work out a unified commentary on the prophetic books of Blake. These poems are mythical in shape: I had to learn something about them, and so I discovered, after the book was published, that I was a
number of a school of "myth criticism" of which I had not previously heard. My second effort, completed ten years later, was an attempt to workout a unified commentary on the theory of literary criticism, in which again myth had a prominent place. To me, the progress from one interest to the other was inevitable, and it was obvious to anyone who read both books that my critical ideas had been derived from Blake.

... It seems perhaps worthwhile to examine what has been so far a mere assumption, the actual connecting links between my study of Blake and my study of criticism. At least the question is interesting to me, and so provides the only genuine motive yet discovered for undertaking any research. (239)

Like Blake, Frye's understanding of the imagination is both a creative and perspective faculty. But, unlike the Romantic writers, Frye's concern with trying to identify morally acceptable knowledge as opposed to rational knowledge and the suggestion that the imagination only points out possibilities but does not link us with actual truths, aligns him with the tradition of those like Kant "who have located the
source of their general principles in the human understanding or the faculties of the mind and who use the word 'imagination' itself as their basic term for discussing art" (Denham, Critical Method 152). This, however, is not to suggest that Frye is indebted to Kantian ideas for his theory of the imagination, but similarities which are striking, cannot be overlooked. Kant began by distinguishing the world as we know it from the world as it is. The world we know consists of phenomena, of things as they appear to us. The world is looked at through a magic looking glass, as it were, and the image of the world is wonderful, but never in direct correspondence to the world of reality. We can know what is in the looking glass, but can never be sure that the reflection is a true image of the "world out there". Kant never denied the existence of things-in-themselves (Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena), or of raw facts; he only insisted that they cannot be known. He argued that to ask what they are is to ask what they would be if we did not know them, and that the very knowing of a thing makes it no longer a thing-in-itself, or raw fact, but a thing known, a phenomenon. Further, in the act of knowing an object,
man contributes to the raw fact certain subjective elements. Therefore, pure empirical knowledge is not possible. Kant confines knowledge within the limits of experience by his strict adherence of knowledge rooted in empirical fact and the assertion that the idea is the ultimate reality. Where the realist insist that the mind must conform itself to outside reality, Kant has the mind mould this reality, according to reason's own rules, out of empirical facts. All knowledge, therefore, becomes partly objective and partly subjective, or, both objective and subjective at the same time.

To posit the Kantian categories on Frye would be to temper the influence of Blake on his work, nevertheless, as Murray Krieger observes:

The starting point for Frye is his distinction between the order of nature and the order of words, the first being the world of science and the second the world of language, the imposition of human forms. As we see that Frye's nature is an objectively determined order while his language is an order determined only by the free act of imagination, so we see in his distinction both the
reflection of Kant's opposition between the realms of nature and of freedom and the operation of the Kantian categories. With the absolute break between subject and object, there is the total differentiation between that world out there that goes its indifferent may without regard to how we would have it and the world created—as Frye would say—in response to human desire, in accordance with our imagination and the creatures with which it chooses to people its world. Thus we can define the world of nature and the world of human freedom, or, more precisely, nature given the scientific forms of objective necessity and nature transformed by the requirements of human imagination. (Critical Legacy" 469-70)

And, for Frye, we may say that "the poetic activity is fundamentally one of identifying the human with the nonhuman world" ("Road" 240) expressed by the term "imaginative" or "creative" which Frye says is "a somewhat hazy metaphor of religious origin" (Fables 151). The separate identities of human and the
nonhuman worlds are what the metaphor expresses, "and the end of the poetic vision is the humanization of reality" (Road 240). This aspect is developed in a fellowship lecture, "The Imaginative and the Imaginary," presented to the American Psychiatric Association (1962), where the imagination is equated with the "Creative force in the mind."

The imaginative or creative force in the mind is what has produced everything that we call culture and civilization. It is the power of transforming a sub-human physical world into a world with a human shape and meaning, a world not of rocks and trees but of cities and gardens, not an environment but a home. (Fables 152)

In his essay on Wallace Stevens Frye tells us that "the center of mental activity is imagination," where "the 'act of the mind' in which imagination begins... is an arresting of a flow of perceptions without and of impressions within. In that arrest there is born the principle of form or order: the inner violence of the imagination is a 'rage for order'" ("Realistic Oriole" 355). And "it is a fact of experience that the world we
live in is a world largely created by the human imagination" (Fables 152), or, more simply, "imagination creates reality" (Fearful Symmetry 27)—it creates culture out of nature; it also produces literary language. The important point to be emphasized, however, is that it creates not the surface structure of literature, but its deeper structures and designs.

This "structuring power of the imagination" is what distinguishes Frye's understanding of the imaginative faculty from Coleridge's. Frye's comments on Steven's relationship to Coleridge is equally well applicable to Frye himself; so much so, that with the appropriate alteration we read:

(Frye) follows Coleridge in distinguishing the transforming of experience by the imagination from the re-arranging of it by the "fancy," and ranks the former higher (ignoring ... T.E. Hulme's clever pseudo-critical reversal of the two). The imagination contains reason and emotion, but the imagination keeps form concrete and
particular, whereas emotion and reason are more apt to seek the vague and the general respectively. ("Realistic Oriole" 355).

To turn an author's word on himself in this manner is, perhaps, not an accepted practice, but the above remarks are appropriate to our purpose here. That Frye does believe in the "transforming of experience by the imagination" is amply substantiated by his numerous descriptions of the role of the imagination couched in language similar to that which Coleridge uses:

The duty of the imaginative man is to force the issue and compel decisions. To the extent that as long as man has imagination he is alive, and therefore the development of the imagination is an increase of life. It follows that restricting the imagination by turning from instead of passing through perception is a reduction of life. It must then tend in the direction of death, so that all imaginative restraint is ultimately, not that it always proceeds to ultimates, a death-impulse. (Fearful Symmetry 55).
Coleridge, in Chapter 13 of the *Biographia Literaria* differentiates between two kinds of imagination which he terms as "primary" and "secondary," and although Coleridge too speaks to the imagination as a recreative force which struggles to idealize and unify, Frye is of the opinion that Coleridge did not actually lay much stress in the power of the imagination to create the total structures of literature, in spite of his almost obsessive preoccupation with "the modifying colors of imagination." Coleridge, Frye says,

intended the climax of the *Biographia Literaria* to be a demonstration of the "esemplastic" or structural nature of the imagination, only to discover when the great chapter arrived that he was unable to write it. There were doubtless many reasons for this, but one was that he does not really think of imagination as a constructive power at all. He means by imagination . . . the reproductive power, the ability to bring to life the texture of characterization and imagery. It is to this power that he applies his favorite metaphor of an organism, where
the unity is some mysterious and elusive "vitality." His practical criticism of work he admires is concerned with texture; he never discusses the total design . . . . It is really fancy which is his "esemplastic" power, and which he tends to think of as mechanical. His conception of fancy as a mode of memory, emancipated from time and space and playing with fixities and definites, admirably characterizes the folk tale, with its remoteness from society and its stock of interchangeable motifs. Thus Coleridge is in the tradition of critical naturalism, which bases its values on the immediacy of contact between art and nature that we continuously feel in the texture of mimetic fiction. (Fables 29-30).

This Aristotelian inheritance of the conception of art imitating nature is what Frye is opposed to. "One limitation of it," he says, "is that it relates only to the work of art as product, as finished and done with. It is perhaps more natural for us today to think in terms of continuous process or creative
activity" (Stubborn Structure 35). Frye, however, does admit that "any discussion of poetry has to begin with the field or area that it works in, the field described by Aristotle as nature," and what Wallace Stevens calls "reality," but says that, "for some reason it has not been nearly so well understood that discursive writing is not thinking, but a direct verbal imitation of thought; that any poem with an idea in it is a secondary imitation of thought, and hence deals with representative or typical thought: that is, with forms of thought rather than specific propositions" ("Realistic Oriole" 353-54). And "reality" he explains, is "not simply the external physical world, but 'things as they are' the existential process that includes ordinary human life on the level of absorption in routine activity," where, "the revolution of consciousness against routine is the starting-point of all mental activity, and the center of mental activity is imagination the power of transforming 'reality' into awareness of reality" (354).

In The Secular Scripture Frye adopts Steven's use of the word "imagination"—"the shaping spirit, the power of ordering which seems to be mysterious to the poet
himself, because it often acts as though it were an identity separate from him" (35) —to formulate his own definition. "The imagination, then," Frye says, is the constructive power of the mind, the power of building unities out of units. In literature the unity is the mythos or narrative; the units are metaphors, that is images connected primarily with each other rather than separately with the outer world. "Reality," for Stevens, is whatever the imagination works with that is not itself. Left to itself, the imagination can achieve only a facile pseudo-conquest of its own formulas, meeting no resistance from reality. The long-standing association between the words imagination and fancy may suggest that the imaginative, by itself, tends to be fantastic or fanciful. But actually, what the imagination, left to itself, produces is the rigidly conventionalized. . . . They are formulaic, and the formulaic unit, of phrase or story, is the cornerstone of the creative imagination, the simplest form of what I call
The archetype is the coordinating principle, then, by which the imagination, while lending credibility and lifeliness, also produces "total design," and this is the most important factor for Frye, and also the basic difference between his and Coleridge's use of the term "imagination." To return to Coleridge, Frye remarks that, "in Coleridge, as in Blake, the central coordinating principle is the psychological one of imagination," and that the imagination which "is instrumental in Coleridge . . . is the power that unifies, but not the thing to be unified, the real coordinating principle," where, "the latter is the Logos, and every aspect of Coleridge's thought is an application of this conception (Sequacious Notes" 175).

Observations like the above have led critics like Ben Howard to counter that Frye's view on the imaginative and the imaginary "establish the fact that for Frye imagination is a constructive faculty as opposed to a perceptive faculty" and that it "is not primarily an originating faculty" (Fancy, Imagination
and Northrop Frye" 31). This misinterpretation of Frye may be corrected by the observation that Frye's ideas on imaginative perception have been taken from Blake's theory of knowledge:

In Blake's view of reality, the imagination, which transforms the nonhuman world(Nature) into something with human shape and meaning (Culture), is opposed to the Commonsense view of Locke in which the perceiving object is separated from the perceived object. Frye agrees with Blake. Sometimes he speaks of two basic modes of apprehending reality, as in the Anatomy, where the scientific mode which perceives an objective nature is opposed to the poetic mode which perceives a transformed one. (Denham, Critical Method 154)

Frye, interpreting Blake, urges us to adopt three basic modes of perceiving the world: the egocentric, or, the world of memory is an unreal world of reflection and abstract ideas; the ordinary, or the world of sight is the real world of subjects and objects that we live in; and the visionary, or, imaginative world is the world of desire, of creators
and creatures (Fearful Symmetry 26). The important thing, however, is not the number of orders of perception, but the fact that there exists different levels of perception and that these depend on the many ways one can broach the relationships between subject and object, a problem common to Blake and, with Kant and Eliot as well. In the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant included a new chapter entitled "Confutation of Idealism," in which he points out that the mind is not free to transcend experience; that even though the phenomenal world is not the world as it exists independently of the mind, all men, nevertheless, share in a common knowledge of this phenomenal world; and that the subjective elements of knowledge do not differ from man to man, but are the same for all. Kant confines knowledge within the limits of experience and asserts that the idea is the ultimate reality. In Arnold too, we find that the broad conception of human creativity is found in Arnold's employment of the word idea where "Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea." Murray Krieger would have us believe that,

Arnold most anticipates Frye, if it isn't
rather that Frye forces us to reinterpret Arnold. In either case, Arnold 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. But we are doomed to be creatures of the night, the time of dreams, so that it becomes our truth, the truth of our poetry. And all our ideas are in that sense poetic. ("Critical Legacy" 472-73)

Frye has diligently pursued the liberation of the human dream, though he prefers to use the term "imagination" or the Blakean term "vision" to the word "idea."

The term "vision" has connotations of religious overtones and "the Romantics . . . spoil both the form and the fun of poetry by insisting so much on the profundity of the imaginative experience as to make it a kind of portentous ersatz religion" ("Road of Excess" 240). But adds Frye,

Here we have the basis for a critical theory
which puts such central conceptions as myth and metaphor into their proper central place. So far from usurping the junction of religion, it keeps literature in the context of human civilization, yet without limiting the infinite variety and range of the poetic imagination. In this conception of art the productive or creative effort is inseparable from the awareness of what it is doing. It is this unity of energy and consciousness that Blake attempts to express by the word "vision". (240)

As a perceptive faculty, the visionary imagination is common to all men. Since, following Frye's conviction that, all men, whether creators or creatures, are motivated by "desire," and since "desire is a part of imagination" (Fearful Symmetry 27), art exhibits the universality of the human imagination. [Blake's] "All Religions are One" means that the material world provides a universal language of images and that each man's imagination speaks that language with his own accent (28). But,

What makes the poet worth studying at all is
his ability to communicate beyond his own context in time and space. We therefore are the present custodians of his meaning, and the profundity of his appeal is relative to our own outlook.

It is here that Blake comes in with his doctrine that "all had originally one language, and one religion." If we follow his own method, and interpret this in imaginative instead of historical terms, we have the doctrine that all symbolism in all art and all religion is mutually intelligible among all men, and that there is such a thing as an iconography of the imagination. (420)

Frye also notes that there are similarities in the ceremonies and myths of primitive people the world over and is of the opinion that, "If we find such impressive archetypal forms emerging from sleeping savage minds, it is surely possible that they would emerge more clearly from the concentrated visions of genius (424). Even though the universality of archetypes suggest that they belong to a single imagination (cf. the Jungian theory of a collective unconscious) shared by all men,
all men do not possess the imaginative faculty to the same degree. Only the educated imagination, possesses the perceptive power of the imagination to use it creatively,

though there may be a distinction, between the creative power of shaping the form and the critical power of seeing the world it belongs to. Any division instantly makes art barbaric and the knowledge of it pedantic. ... The vision inspires the act, and the act realizes the vision. This is the most thoroughgoing view of the partnership of creation and criticism in literature. ("Road of Excess" 240)

It is in such a partnership where "the artist is par excellence the man who struggles to develop his perception into creation, his sight into vision (Fearful Symmetry 26), but all men, according to Frye, can educate their imagination into a creative awareness to perceive created forms.