CHAPTER — 4

Myth as Code: the anxiety of faith
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I

Very early in his career, Frye discovered that myth is the hidden source of creativity and the secret key to unlock the implications of that creative endeavor. In fact, it appeared, that he was at that point joining the ranks of the cartel of Myth-critics, who constituted the most powerful academic voice then, though his distinguishing features very assertively separated his own stance from theirs'. His difference was articulated most in his understanding of the function and the scope of the category known as myth; whereas the general myth critic was interested in revealing the mythic sub-structure under any given text by way of an intellectual grave-digging or a critical exhumation, Frye moved from the interpretation of any individual text to the grand-structure of mythology that animates art and informs criticism; secondly, whereas the Cambridge Hellenists restricted the meaning of myth to Classical i.e. to Greco-Roman myths only, Frye drew on the Judeo-Christian mythic inheritance. Though the Western civilization very justifiably finds its epistemic roots in Greece, its spiritual, and its existential concerns are cast in the Hebraic mould. However, this aspect of the European consciousness and perhaps, conscience was intellectually underplayed under the ethos of the Post-Renaissance Hellenism. This new intellectual regime was against anything associated with the impugned Liturgy and thus, suspected the Judaic inheritance to be an unwanted ir-rational, and even, perhaps, anti-rational baggage for the Western World. But, at same time, despite all these cultural pressures, Frye observed, the Jewish thought continued to exert influence on the
fe, and psyche of the Western man, especially through, the simultaneously unobtrusive and explosive intrusion of the Bible. Frye therefore celebrates the Bible as the ultimate artistic and existential code of the West.

This chapter attempts to analyse and comprehend this seminal understanding of Frye in the light of his individual religious search and tries to locate his commitment to the Bible-inspired hermeneutics and theorization in the context of the history of biblical criticism. His personal appraisal of Blake is summarized here as Blake is the most intimate, and pervasive influence on him and the most significant clue to unravel the complexities of his thought.

II

The text of the Old Testament, known by the acronym Tanakh—for Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings)—for centuries has been subjected to critical scrutiny by Jewish scholars. Rabbinic authorities in late antiquity (tannaim) from the time of the Mishnah; amoraim, from the time of the Talmud, developed some of the best-known and most influential forms of traditional interpretive theories of the text of the Bible. The contributions of these scholars have been preserved in numerous volumes of midrash compilations and in the Talmud (the definitive compilation of rabbinic laws, legends, and interpretation from the first to the sixth century)

The Hebrew word midrash means "interpretation." It most commonly refers to
classic compilations of Bible interpretation in early rabbinism (the first six centuries C.E.), 2) one of the major interpretive styles associated with those compilations, and 3) some types of contemporary interpretations of texts (of Scripture or of fiction) that bear resemblances to the classic rabbinic modes. Classical rabbinic midrash is a complex and diverse sort of writing compiled and written over a period that spans several centuries and fills many discrete volumes. Midrash most frequently takes the form of a commentary to biblical verses. There are also brief but sometimes complex narrative segments embedded in midrash compilations.

It is useful to provide some examples to illustrate the progress in midrash scholarship. Earlier scholarship commonly asserted that midrash falls into two content-specific categories: halckhic (legal) and aggadic (homiletical). To be sure, since many of the texts of Tanakh can be categorized as either legal or nonlegal, there appears to be some strong basis for this distinction.

Early twentieth-century scholarship frequently invoked the distinction between styles of exegesis—*peshat*, "plain meaning," *andderash*, "fanciful interpretation"—to define the nature of midrash and its later derivatives in medieval rabbinic Bible commentaries. This division was first articulated by the rabbis themselves. Of course, many midrash moves do fall into the categories "literal" and "imaginative his particular inner dynamic and to his social and historical circumstance.

The earlier rabbah midrash compilations are thought to have been completed in the fourth and fifth centuries. *Genesis Rabbah* makes a coherent claim that the origins of the world and of the tribes of Israel reveal God's plan and portend for the future of Israel's salvation. Neusner argues
The later rabbah midrash compilations are said to derive from the sixth and seventh centuries. *Ruth Rabbah* makes clear through its comments that opposite entities may be united under God's will. The editors of this book dealt with the issues of Gentiles becoming Jews and the distinction between men and women. The proposition that from a Moabite woman comes the Israelite messiah is repeatedly conveyed by means of a symbolic vocabulary of verbal images embedded in the midrash materials. *Song of Songs Rabbah* understands the biblical text as a metaphor for the love of God for Israel. The compilation furnishes us with comments that systematically connect the poetry of the *Song* with the symbols of rabbinism. Thus, this work forms for us a discourse, not of narrative or of polemics or propositions, but rather of the symbolism that defines the religion. During the Middle Ages, especially in the tenth century, the new methods of the lower criticism of the Hebrew text made their way into medieval interpretation. These derived mainly from the authorities in Spain: Men-ahem ben Jacob ibn Saruq, Dunash ben Labrat, Coeval with the revitalization of literary theory that took place in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the term "biblical criticism" began to command for scholars and practitioners of literary study almost as wide a semantic field as it did for nearly two centuries in Germany,
Where, under the rubric "documentary hypothesis," it referred to the multiplicity of compositional schools said to make up the Judeo-Christian Old Testament. The advent of theory brought with it a heightened concern for the dynamics of critical reading. As the discussion of these dynamics and in general, of the "hypothesis of textuality," made its way increasingly into the study of other cultural monuments, it was probably inevitable that this concern would show up in biblical study as well.

"Biblical reading" or "biblical commentary" would therefore appear more reflective of this inner Hebraic teaching or instruction. But "biblical" is no less laden with difficulty than "criticism." In a Western European context, "biblical" inevitably suggests "Judeo-Christian." But no such scriptures exist for Jews. Although the words of the Old Testament may at times appear identical with the Hebrew Torah there is no Jewish Old Testament, if only because there is no New Testament. The Bible, the Torah, the teaching (torah) or instruction or commandments (mitzvot) given by God through Moses at Sinai to the community of Israel is all there is. All the rest, as the sages say, is commentary. The very word "Bible," deriving from the Greek ta biblia and meaning "books" or "the books," has no correlative in Hebrew, where mikra, tanakh, and torah refer to the same body of writings but are deemed indissolubly linked to their divine author.

In the modern context, we may broadly distinguish two readings, those that accept and extend the New Critical, humanistic, historical perspective and those that resist or reject it.
Mainstream Christian institutions, for example, continue to read the Hebrew Bible much as they have for nearly two thousand years—as indissolubly linked to the New Testament, especially to the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Whether mediated by church authority or developed by individual textual experiences, it is informed by a tradition of such reformist reading. The fundamental insufficiency of an Old Testament of wrath and violence before a triumphant new covenant of mercy and love, conceived either theologically or historically, remains a cornerstone of Christian biblical interpretation.

A third position developed that identified both strategies as doctrinal, dogmatic, or theological—in short, subjective—and opted instead for a more demonstrable, "documentary," objective approach. Born within the context of critical philosophy, which detaches a sovereign subject from the object of his or her attention and detaches both from the interference of any extrahuman authority, modern biblical criticism, the Wissenschaft des Judentums as practiced in Germany since the end of the eighteenth century, would thus appear as a kind of Protestantism without divinity.

The work of Robert Alter is especially important in this regard. In a powerful book on biblical narrative (1981), Alter suggested that the formalist approach developed by the New Critics for the study of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry might productively be applied to biblical Scripture. Quite apart from questions about compositional origins or limitations one had now, Alter argued, to ask more difficult "literary" questions about how such admittedly disparate compositional traditions could be perceived as "going together." In 1985 Alter extended his
Consideration to biblical poetics, and together with Frank Kermode, who had written widely on the relation between narrative and religious scripture himself, as in *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (1979). He compiled *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (1987), which gathered essays on all books of the Judeo-Christian Old and New testaments. With these publications, the literary study of the Bible was off to a running start. Other critics, more visibly influenced by Continental theory, began undertaking projects of a more hybrid and experimental nature. Geoffrey H. Hartman, for example, organized a session at the English Institute at Harvard in the early 1980s. To this he brought scholars and critics from literature and from Near Eastern and religious studies departments including Alter, Michael Fishbane, Herbert Marks, and Leslie Brisman. The biblical study was quickly projected into the maelstrom of theoretical debate. Hartman's own essay was published in Budick and Hartman's *Midrash and Literature* (1986).

In the wake of these events, the study of the Bible within both of these literary and theoretical orientations has quickly expanded. In 1987 David Damrosch applied some of the recent theoretical discussions of narrative to the older historical-critical approach. Daniel Boyarin's *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, (1990) is also an important exploration in this field. New conferences and subsequent collections have also become more frequent. Regina Schwartz describes her collection of essays deriving from a conference she directed, *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory*, 1990, as "complementary" to the project of Alter and Kermode. Jacob Rosenblatt and Joseph Sitterson published a collection of essays from a 1989 conference at Georgetown University in which the question of aesthetic unity and its relation to biblical reading was placed center stage (*"Not in Heaven": Coherence and..."


Formalist, poststructuralist, neoreligious, and neo-historical critical approaches aside, writing about the Bible within literary studies has come from other quarters as well. Younger scholars like Susan Handelman, have begun to trace more systematically the intersection between Judaic and poststructuralist interpretation. Some of the practitioners of structuralist or

Jacques Derrida's scattered remarks on biblical and theological texts have attracted increasing attention. For example, his philosophic and literary critiques of Edmond Jabès and Emmanuel Levinas turn upon biblical and more broadly Hebraic themes in those writers. Concomitant with this activity, researchers in Near Eastern or religious studies trained by an older generation, e.g., Nahum Sarna and Jacob Neusner, began to engage more boldly hermeneutical pursuits; for example, the hermeneutics studies of Michael Fishbane, the poetics studies of James Kugel, David Stern's studies of midrash and interpretation, and Phyllis Trible's studies of biblical sexuality and terror. Similarly in Israel, where scholars such as Martin Noth, Umberto Cassuto, Gershom Scholem, and Yehezkel Kaufmann were once unquestioningly revered, new more critical studies have begun to appear. Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (1985) develops the potential for looking at biblical texts with the methodological apparatus once reserved for the novel, and Moshe Idel's *Kabbalah* (1988) attempts to remedy the limitations he feels have been imposed upon our appreciation of the Jewish mystical tradition by studying aspects that, in his view, Scholem left out.
In France, the work of Andre Neher and Emmanuel Levinas merits singular attention. Neher's analysis of the story of Cain and Abel, which was later included in his general study of silence in the biblical and modern contexts (*The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, 1970, trans., 1981), has been extraordinarily influential. And Levinas's "Talmudic lessons" have become the centerpiece of the yearly meetings of the Colloques des intellectuels juifs de langue franchise (see, e.g., *Nine Talmudic Readings* and *Difficult Freedom*).

Levinas's work is especially important to the changing status of biblical study in France. Developed in a powerful series of books and essays (as in *Totality and Infinity / Otherwise than Being*), his central philosophic thesis pits the radical otherness or alterity of transcendence against traditional Platonic ontological meaning of transcendence. Thereby, it translates the notion of anti-idolatry. That in turn informs discussions of Torah in a number of religious-studies contexts and as such is likely to prove decisive in their future contact.

Finally, a few other researchers who continue to interest themselves in the intersections between biblical texts and contemporary theoretical concerns deserve special mention. One of the most powerful instances of modern biblical criticism has emerged from the work of Rene Girard, a Frenchman working in America largely on texts in literature, cultural anthropology, and psychoanalysis. His volumes on the European novel and on the relation between violence and the sacred in primitive communities have attracted a large international following (*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* and *Violence and the Sacred*). More recently, Girard has turned his attention to origins of his own disclosures; identifying the scapegoating mechanisms, he finds the origin of cultural order in the biblical critique of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible and Christian gospel. Raymund Schwager, S.J., has developed the implications of Girard's biblical...

The energy currently devoted to biblical study in literary-critical practice is, in short, enormous; a keyword search for items under both "bible and criticism" and "bible and interpretation" in a major research library yields more than 3,800 volumes since 1970; and annotated bibliographies such as Mark Powell’s The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism are the order of the day.

III

The saturation of William Blake (1757-1827), an engraver by trade, in the practice and history of painting and printmaking grounded a preoccupation with style, vision, and reproduction. Confronting the alienating imperatives toward standardization and specialization in London’s late-eighteenth-century publishing industry, Blake countered that culture by authoring, calligraphing, illustrating, singeing, etching, printing, binding, and publishing his own work.
Such strength of commitment compounded with the haunting psychocultural "myth-mash" irama of his "giant forms" in a composite art form that was the subject of the early work of a number of theoretically inclined critics, for example, Hazard Adams (*William Blake*, 1953), Harold Bloom (*Blake's Apocalypse*, 1965), Northrop Frye (*Fearful Symmetry*, 1947), and E. D. Hirsch (*Innocence and Experience*, 1964).

Blake's scattered critical formulations reflect largely his training in the visual arts; they are difficult to reconcile with each other and, especially, with his literary practice and its many strategies for dissemination (unusual punctuation, puns, variant "copies" of a given title). His recurrent emphasis on "line" may be contrasted with the then dominant "finished" style of engraving, whose pretension to mime in monochrome tone, color, and shadow required decomposing the image into a tedious system of tiny cross-hatchings or dots and lozenges; the polished style of Augustan poetry, with its code of diction and allusion, made for Blake a kind of literary analog. In the labored mediation that such style demands, Blake saw the illusion underlying any attempt to represent external nature or historical acts; drawing directly on the copperplate, he argued, offers an unmediated line from the beholder to the artist's insight into the artificial nature of reality ("Mental Things are alone Real," *Poetry* 565). Only a firm and determinate line establishes the individual identities or minute particulars in which "the Infinite alone resides" (205). On the other hand, the "bounding line" entails the loss of other possibilities inherent in realized form, so that only by the institution of "contrary" identities (e.g., text and design) can Blake ensure "progression" (34).
In the 1790s Blake urged "energy" and "an improvement of sensual enjoyment" (39; e.g., greater pleasure in reading); after 1800 he favored "mental fight" and a vision of redemptive imagination that taps a heritage of Christian radicalism. From the perspective of energy he inaugurated the Romantic revaluation of Milton as "a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it" (35), and then in *Milton, a Poem* he developed his rereading into a new type of epic. Blake's complex psychological model gives large play to sexual drive and to repression as it unfolds in the ongoing strife of old Urizen ("horizon"/"your-eyes-in"/"your reason," etc.) and inspiring Los ("lossV'Sol" [Apollos]), of male Zoas and female Emanations. "The stubborn structure of the language" is Los's building (183). Blake's emphasis on individual identity is engaged on one side by a concern with prideful "selfhood" and on the other by the conclusion that "we are not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals" (r3). The "true" or "Real Man" appears in or as "Poetic Genius" (1-2) or "Imagination / (Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever)" (148).

Blake confronts literary theory with a semiotics that stresses how significance can be found in every particular—not least in the "Revelation in the Litteral Expression" (143)—a psychology that highlights the role of the perceiver, a deconstructive dialectic that vibrates with awareness of how form and frame are at once indispensable and intolerably limiting, and the moving instance of a half-century's daily care about making a difference: "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (153).
One of the characteristic preoccupations of the modern age has been the problem of how to account for human identity. The question hinges on the degree to which human identity is externally determined or predetermined, and the degree to which human beings are free to determine their own identity. It is an anxious question, in part because, while the advances made in disciplines such as biology, sociology, and psychology have improved our understanding of the various forces that fix or predetermine a human being's identity, we find that our ability to account for the aspect of the self that is not determined by these forces, but continues to exercise free will, has scarcely improved at all.

Any concept of freedom will require two elements: the first is the will that is at the center of the self that is free to choose; and the second is a context within which the free will operates. In other words, in order to experience freedom, one must believe that the free act has meaning. Accordingly, we experience this freedom less through our ability to compel others to do our will than through our courage to face any rationalization and self-deception to move beyond the circumstances that might blind us. The question of how this position of authority is to be attained was once the business of religion, Mosley suggests. 'Religion was what let men be free, gave men an area of freedom; suggested what to make of themselves in it. Religion was about the sort of disciplines, guides, there were in the achieving of this in oneself; about what could be done about it for others' *(Religion and Experience)* (37) Yet it is obvious that the language of religion is widely regarded with suspicion or indifference today.
There are several good reasons for such misgivings about religion. In the first place, religion as too often placed itself on the defensive by regarding any new idea that requires a codification of religious faith as a kind of attack. That attitude has resulted, argues Alfred North Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World*, in the degeneration of religion 'into a lecent formula wherewith to embellish a comfortable life,' because of its a inadequacy to engage the modern world in any serious manner (168).

V

The phrase 'religious experience' commonly refers to two ideas. When someone speaks of having had a religious experience, it refers to an event, a finite and present sense of spiritual communion. When there is discussion of whether some statement or action is commensurate with religious experience, the phrase refers to a body of wisdom which has been accumulated through contemplation of spiritual matters - in other words, a general spiritual outlook. Both ideas are pertinent to this argument, which attempts to show, first, that certain specific moments of insight in Frye's life have the character of particular events of spiritual communion, and, second, that these inform and are interrelated with Frye's general spiritual outlook, which in turn pervades all aspects of his thought. It is worth analysing, then, how Frye's version of religious experience relates to some other trends in religious experience in the twentieth century.

In *The Double Vision*, Frye declares that he has spent 'the better part of seventy-eight years writing out the implications of insights that have taken up considerably less than an hour of all
It is rewarding to take him at his word by isolating and discussing a few of these moments of insight. In some cases, the details are too sketchy to allow for much discussion: for example, Frye spoke of the importance of a particular reading of Spengler's *Decline of the West* at the Edmonton YMCA in 1931, but the precise character of the experience itself remains obscure. On the other hand, there are at least three other occasions during which Frye underwent an experience of what might be called a religious kind, of which he was able to provide a more precise account.

All three of these experiences occurred fairly early in Frye's life, the first two in his teenage years, the third in his early twenties, yet each had a decisive effect that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Frye's first such experience took place while he was a student at Aberdeen High School in Moncton. In a 1979 interview with Bob Sandier, he remembered 'walking along St. George St. to high school and just suddenly that whole shitty and smelly garment (of fundamentalist teaching I had all my life) just dropped off into the sewers and stayed there. It was like the Bunyan feeling, about the burden of sin falling off his back only with me it was a burden of anxiety. Anything might have touched it off, but I don't know what specifically did, or if anything did. I just remember that suddenly that that was no longer a part of me and would never be again.'

Frye explained something of the effect of that Damascene experience in a letter to Roy Daniells, saying that he had decided, 'without realizing it at the time, that I was going to accept out of religion only what made sense to me as a human being. I was not going to worship a god whose actions, judged by human standards, were contemptible. That was where Blake helped me so much: he taught me that the lugubrious old stinker in the sky that I had heard so much
about existed all right, but that his name was Satan, that his function was to promote tyranny in society and repression in the mind. This meant that the Methodist church down at the corner was consecrated mainly to devil-worship, but, because it did not know that, it would tolerate something better without knowing what that was either.

The second particular experience has been less precisely explained, but one finds fragments referring to the event scattered throughout Frye's work. The kernel apparently lies in a train ride which Frye took in 1927 to visit his sister, Vera, in Chicago at age fourteen (NFC, 44). This initial experience was later augmented by a number of other overnight train rides, but it was that first long journey that left the deepest impression on Frye's mind. The phenomenon that precipitated the insight is familiar to all those who have sat awake on a train overnight: as one sits drowsily watching the world pass by outside the window and the sky gradually darkens, there comes a moment of discovery that what one is looking at is no longer the scenery outside the window, but rather reflections in the window pane of objects that are actually inside the carriage. The period of mesmerized ambiguity about what is inside and what is outside, what is illusion and what is reality, gradually gives way to a point at which the outside world is all but invisible, and one is left merely staring at one's own reflection. As the dawn breaks, the process is reversed, and by stages one's focus and understanding of the objects of perception are taken up by the outside world again.

The phenomenon itself is not so remarkable, of course, as the insight which it occasioned for Frye. In essence, this was the realization that nature and the world at large always appear
within an envelope of human interpretation; accordingly, the passive mind will find itself gazing at an illusion it believes is reality and, unaware of the projected character of what it perceives, numbed and satisfied by this illusion, it will end by staring complacently at its own narcissistic reflection. Set against the deluded passive mind is the active imagination, which struggles to detach its projections from its perceptions through a process of critical analysis.

Frye's third experience occurred in an academic context; as Frye describes it, the 'one split second when, cramming for an examination and dizzy with lack of sleep and benzedrine, he suddenly knows that something of which his own mind forms a part is much more deeply involved in the nature of things than he had ever dreamed' (LT, 19). Frye's version of this experience took place in Bowles Lunch, an all-night diner on Bloor Street, where he was working on an essay discussing Blake's poem Milton, a paper, he tells us, "I sat down to write, as was my regular bad habit in those days, the night before. The foreground of the paper was commentary, which was assuredly difficult enough for that poem, but in the background there was some principle that kept eluding me. On inspection, the principle seemed to be that Milton and Blake were connected by their use of the Bible, which was not merely commonplace but seemed antiliterary as well. If Milton and Blake were alike on this point, that likeness merely concealed what was individual about each of them, so that in pursuing the likeness I was chasing a shadow and avoiding the substance. Around about three in the morning a different kind of intuition hit me, though it took me twenty years to articulate it. The two poets were connected by the same thing, and sameness leads to individual variety, just as likeness leads to monotony. I began dimly to see that the principle pulling me away
rom the historical period was the principle of mythological framework. The Bible had provided a frame of mythology for European poets: an immense number of critical problems began to solve themselves as soon as one realized this'. (SM, 17)

Frye adds, 'So far from hitching literature to a structure of belief, this principle actually emancipates literature from questions of belief altogether' (SM, 18). The Great Code and Words with Power are only the most obvious derivations of that insight. Before looking at the place of these individual experiences within Frye's general outlook, the criteria for calling these experiences religious needs analysis. It is obvious enough how the first experience falls into the category, although undoubtedly even it would be deemed irreligious rather than religious by many. But it may seem that the other two experiences are moments of critical or philosophical insight that have less apparent connections with religion.

James's book also provides support for the legitimacy of the 'religious experience' label in the resemblance that the pattern of some of his accounts bears to Frye's insights. The letting drop of the shitty fundamentalist garment, for example, echoes the 'self-surrender' type of conversion detailed by James, where anxiety and the burden of sin is dropped off. Frye's own comparison of the experience to Bunyan's conversion shows his awareness of this.

This is to take the view of Hans Kung, who argues in Theology for the Third Millennium that 'religious experience is a priori interpreted experience, and for that reason it is stamped by the religious tradition in question and by its different expressive forms' (234).

Certainly a Methodist upbringing would be particularly fertile in this respect, for religious experience has always been central to Wesleyan thought. Indeed, it was in part the unease and
uspicion with which the religious experiences claimed by John Wesley and his brother, Charles, were received that prompted their decision to secede from the Church of England. In their view, justification through faith had been one of the main tenets of the Protestant reform, and the apparent drift away from this concept towards a more doctrinal emphasis was a serious theological error. In the event, their secession was not nearly so abrupt nor absolute as those of many other sects have been, and the centrality of religious experience to Methodism in no sense signified an abjuration of structured worship. Rather, the main significance of their secession was a shift to emphasize the necessity of a personal sense of spiritual communion and the responsibility of Christians to realize their faith in their daily lives. The corollary of this latter point was that faith included a belief in the perfectibility of human nature, that life could be lived without sin, and this was the other major distinguishing feature of Methodism.

In *The Psychology of Religion* (1899), E.D. Starbuck suggests that conversion is, by its very nature, an experience most suited to adolescence, when character formation is most precipitous; many religions, recognizing this, promote religious conversion as a kind of intensification of the natural growth into adulthood. Starbuck's idea is discussed by William James, who agrees that there are many adolescent conversions that bear the mark of their religious traditions to such a degree that they have an air of pre-appointment to them. He also reminds us that all such imitations have a presumably authentic original, and that the element of tradition in the form of a conversion experience is no proof against its authenticity or the possibility that it possesses unique content (224,262). Moreover, James makes a distinction between the nonvolitional and the volitional conversion experience: that which occurs as a kind of unexpected release and that which is the result of an active search for enlightenment.
Ayre's own version of the conversion experience occurred in adolescence, and though it would all into the nonvolitional category, it is quite probable that the climate of his religious upbringing and the character development endemic to adolescence both played a role in preparing his mind for this moment of insight. But, returning to Ayre's remark that Frye's dropping of the shitty garment of fundamentalism was a parody of the traditional Methodist conversion, the question is begged as to whether it may not be more accurate to say that the conversions-by-rote typical of fundamentalist Methodism were the parodies, and that Frye's experience was closer to the sort of conversion Wesley originally had in mind. The answer may be indeterminable, because it is not the sort of matter that can be definitively settled with a straightforward appeal to history; but the ambiguity is in itself suggestive. Some of Frye's views were of the extremely heterodox nature. His statement that 'the God of official Christianity' was 'invented as a homeopathic cure for the teachings of Jesus' \( [FS, 61] \), is its manifest example. There is every sign that he understood his own religious experience as belonging to the Protestant tradition rather than standing apart from and against it. If the fact that he was an ordained minister of the United Church of Canada were not evidence enough of this opinion, Frye makes the point explicitly in a number of writings.

This, however, that Frye's religious experience is simply a derivation of the Methodist outlook. While certain structures and assumptions have been discussed, one is yet to consider the aspect of Frye's religious experience that is unique, which is to say, the mystic element in his outlook. The word 'mystic' is a somewhat problematic term because it invites so many
confused, pretentious, or obfuscating connotations. It is a problem that Frye, himself, wrested with in an afterword to Fearful Symmetry, in which he discussed the question of Blake's mysticism. Frye likens Blake's art to the spiritual discipline of Yoga, which liberates man by uniting him with God.

As we would expect, Frye's own 'vision of the prodigious and unthinkable metamorphosis of the human mind' is similar in many ways to Blake's; but Frye's ideas about religion developed over the course of the twentieth century and it is in the context of twentieth-century theology that they are best understood. In his 1949 essay called The Church: Its Relation to Society Frye seems to echo Whitehead when he argues: "The Church has been tempted by the world to present its faith as an obstinate reiteration of traditional myths, insisting in the teeth of all natural law that they are facts, and defying the advance of science as a dog howls at the rising moon. It must learn to present its faith again as the emancipation and fulfillment of reason" (RTW, 219). Of course, Frye and Whitehead are not the only people to complain about hidebound literalism in the modern church's teachings. Indeed, some of these complaints about religious conservatism have been preludes to programs of theological reform. Yet it is apparent that with some of the alternative theologies comes an alternative problem.

One of the most prevalent alternative theologies pursues the vein of thought that Rudolph Bultmann termed 'demythologization.' The main idea is that religious faith should not be contingent on the historical truth of events recorded in the Bible, a notion which is reasonable enough. However, the thrust of this reaction to literalism has been, in large part, towards an internalization of religion, an attempt to maintain certain religious attitudes by locating their
authority entirely within the psyche. The difficulty with this approach is explained by Colin
Salck in *Myth, Truth and Literature*: it is hard to see how on the internalized view of religious
belief there can be any such thing as a *religious* way of life or a *religious* dimension of experi-
ence at all. Frye saw this two-sided problem with great clarity, and articulated it in *The Secular
Scripture*:

"Not all of us will be satisfied with calling a central part of our mythological inheritance a
revelation from God, and, though each chapter in this book closes on much the same cadence, I
cannot claim to have found a more acceptable formulation. It is quite true that if there is no
sense that the mythological universe is a human creation, man can never get free of servile an-
xieties and superstitions, never surpass himself, in Nietzsche's phrase. But if there is no sense
that it is also something uncreated, something coming from elsewhere, man remains a
Narcissus staring at his own reflection, equally unable to surpass himself. Somehow or other,
the created scripture and the revealed scripture, or whatever we call the latter, have to keep
fighting each other like Jacob and the angel, and it is through the maintaining of this struggle,
the suspension of belief between the spiritually real and the humanly imaginative, that our own
mental evolution grows". (60-)

As with so many philosophical questions, to restate the problem is to come halfway towards
articulating the solution. Such a rearticulation is provided by F.W. Dillistone in his book
Religious Experience and Christian Faith, a study of the idea of religious experience through the lives and works of ten prominent thinkers of the twentieth century. Dillistone suggests that there are two overarching patterns revealed: one is centripetal, the other centrifugal. The centripetal pattern concentrates on the particular event in space and time - the location and moment of the crucifixion - 'as that which bestows meaning on the whole of Christian experience' (96-7). Dillistone sees such an outlook evinced, for example, in the work of T.S. Eliot and Paul Tillich. He cites Eliot's declaration that 'To apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint' and Tillich's insistence that the meaning of his whole system proceeds from the historic moment of the crucifixion as evidence of the centripetal pattern of their thought (104-5).

The centrifugal pattern, by contrast, tends to find meaning by spinning away from the constrictions of the particular world to discover the immanent divinity of a broader and deeper experience. Two examples which Dillistone cites of the centrifugal pattern of religious experience are Arnold Toynbee's notion that historical patterns evince a spiritual and eternal reality beyond all worldly phenomena and Wallace Stevens's belief that ultimate meaning lies in 'a reality that forces itself upon our consciousness and refuses to be managed and mastered' a meaning that Stevens suggests can only be glimpsed momentarily through the 'incessant conjunctionings' of imagination and reality (106-9).

For the centripetal pattern, an individual's relation to transcendence finally rests upon the concept of reconciliation; for the centrifugal it is fulfillment. The centripetal attitude looks at a specific point in the mythological framework for ultimate spiritual authority, whereas the
entrifugal attitude finds the ultimate authority in a personal experience which is independent of scripture. The identification between these ideas and the articulation of the problem may be somewhat confusing because the centripetal pattern corresponds to the sense that the authority is placed externally, whereas the centrifugal pattern sees the encounter with authority as an internal matter. But the matter is somewhat clarified when one recognizes that the difference amounts to where the centre of religious experience is placed. If the centre is located in a specific moment in time and space, as revealed through scripture, there is a centripetal movement of religious experience which leads all individual minds from any other location in time and space, i.e., the periphery, inward to that location, the centre. If, one locates the centre within the individual's mind, the movement is an expansive one, a process of projection, or a progressive accommodation of the larger world to the central experience of spiritual immanence located in the individual; the movement is from the centre to the periphery.

Dillistone concludes his study of Christian religious experience in the twentieth century by asking rhetorically whether we must 'settle for one or the other' or whether some kind of dialectic or 'mutual interchange' is possible (116). Such a mutual interchange is precisely the solution suggested by Frye, but the presentation of the problem in terms of centripetal and centrifugal patterns evokes another of Frye's theories which can assist the articulation of the religious experience implied.

On a number of occasions, Frye remarked that whenever we read we find our attention moving in two opposite directions: centripetally to comprehend the order of words and centrifugally to relate what we are reading to our experience of the outside world. It is this same framework which provides the pattern for Frye's version of religious experience: both the centrifugal
emphasis on the individual experience and the centripetal emphasis on the specificity of the passion of Christ are integrated in the attitude which, following Blake, Frye called the 'double vision.' It is a version of the vision through the window pane of the train, the deliberate and ambivalent shifting from one mode of seeing to another, and that metamorphic process becomes a liminal point through which Frye's overarching vision is achieved.

Having understood Frye's general spiritual outlook, his 'double vision,' in those terms, one may see the relationship of the specific religious experiences described at the beginning of the paper in a new light. The experiences form a sequence that passes from what William James would call a nonvolitional through to a volitional conversion with an intermediate stage. That is to say, the first experience, in which the shitty garment of fundamentalism was let drop, was not sought after, but represented a kind of release of the mind to apprehend what was already latent in experience. The second experience, in which there was a metamorphosis of perception from window to mirror to window over the course of a train journey, involved a liminal recognition of the difference between the passive and the active role - in a sense it was a revelation of the necessity of assuming a volitional attitude towards experience. The third insight, in which the Bible was seen to provide a code for art which existed independently of personal interpretation, was the product of concentrated study, and although it also has the character of a kind of release of the mind from one level to another, because of the element of discipline and self-application, it resembles what James would recognize as a volitional conversion.

These three moments of insight may be regarded as a series of transactions between the individual imagination and God. In the first instance, the escape from fundamentalism is experienced as a kind of withdrawal of divine presence from inhibiting and neurotic social
mperatives. This results in a sense of release, a recognition that the realm of myth is separable from individual experience. There is a centrifugal aspect to this experience, for in escaping from a dogmatic interpretation of myth, the authority of the religious experience is thrown onto the relation between one's conscience and one's experience of the world.

In the second event, the transaction is experienced as an exchange of one's sense of the origin of perception from an exterior to an interior source and then back again. That exchange prompts the recognition that one creates much of one's own world, and that such self-creation can become a trap when one fails to perceive one's own projections disguised in what Hans Robert Jauss would call the 'horizon of expectation' or E.H. Gombrich would call the 'grid of perception,' meaning the interpretive structure endemic to human perception.\(^\text{10}\) Hence, it is recognized that to escape from a narcissistic reading of oneself will require an effort of critical thought. Essentially, this insight implies that one may, with effort, pass from a centripetal to a centrifugal pattern of experience and back again.

The third transaction involves an insight achieved through the process of self-detachment, or at least the repudiation of passive assumptions which was discovered in the second experience. There is a recognition that a society's mythology, considered as a complete structure, approaches neutrality to the degree to which it can be stripped of its literal, denotative aspect. The Bible, for example, may serve as a structure which may be used in any number of ways. The experience of liberation is earned through a disciplined process whereby one appropriates the central structure, internalizes it and makes it one's own, thereby enabling a release of one's own energy.
The integration of these three discrete Frye experiences into a general spiritual outlook provides not only an answer to the question of how to reconcile the competing versions of Christian religious experience, but also the philosophical ground on which Frye's theories stand. Having answered the postmodern theoretical question (where the centre is located?) experience finds its root. Speaking of the New Testament at the 1984 MLA conference, Frye argued:

'the text is not the absence of a former presence but the place of the resurrection of the presence ... In this risen presence text and reader are equally involved. The reader is a whole of which the text is a part: the text is a whole of which the reader is a part: these contradictory movements keep passing into one another and back again. The Logos at the center, which is inside the reader and not hidden behind the text, continually changes place with the Logos at the circumference that encloses both' (MM, 26).

As A.C. Hamilton remarks, this is what Frye would say of any literary work (Northrop Frye, 218). In other words, Frye's critical outlook is of a piece with his spiritual outlook because his religious experience has been developed into a total philosophy. The theological dimensions of this philosophy are expressed in perhaps their most compressed and lucid form in Frye's reading of the Book of Job. 'Anyone interested in the Bible and literature' wrote Frye in Words with Power, 'will eventually find himself revolving around the Book of Job like a satellite' (310). That is because the Book of Job neatly represents our ambivalence and anxiety about setting any faith in a spiritual life when we live in this evidently material world. There are various levels at which the Book of Job may be read: the first sections seem to pose fewer difficulties, but in the interpretation of Job's religious experience, understandings diverge sharply, often losing themselves, it would seem, in the whirlwind out of which Yahweh speaks.
The least sophisticated, and unfortunately probably the most prevalent, reading sees Job's experience as a simple lesson of humility in the face of an inscrutable deity - a hard lesson admittedly, but for which Job is duly rewarded with a restored and even augmented fortune and family. A closer and more thoughtful reading shows that Job is indeed reduced to humility, but that the lesson he learns, from Yahweh's relentless prodding, is that persisting in a simplistic view of guilt and innocence as the ruling principles of the world is wrong-headed. One conclusion drawn from this is that, given the complexity of the deity's concerns, as exemplified by the existence of monsters like Behemoth and Leviathan, it is naive to think that the simple attempt to maintain one's moral innocence should be sufficient to ensure a happy life.

Frye takes Job's vision in a different direction, insisting that what Yahweh attempts to show Job, after relieving him of his obsession with moral rewards and punishments, is that to insist on thinking in terms of causes at all is to arrive back at the First Cause - the Creation - which is not much help in itself. However, the vision of Behemoth and Leviathan which follows represents the possibility of seeing with God-like eyes, for the vision suggests that these forces of evil can be seen to be external to Job, if Job employs the context for perception implied in Yahweh's recapitulation of the creation (see GC, 196-8; WP, 310-13). The exegetical validity of this reading is less important to argument here than the continuity between it and the pattern which is assumed by Frye's version of religious experience. Once dogmatism has been shed and Job's tendency to project his own ideas has been revealed, the vision of the Creation as recapitulated by Yahweh restores Job's sense of a centre within himself. From this centre it is possible to perceive a complete framework, offering the imagination a kind of non-temporal, spatial orientation; a context within which the individual is able to participate in the creative process, rather than remaining a passive observer. In other words, both the centripetal goal of
econciation and the centrifugal goal of fulfillment are integrated in Frye's version of the religious experience.

This Chapter began by talking about the modern predicament of identity, with the suggestion that one means of confronting and possibly mitigating the problem would be a version of religious experience that affirmed spirituality as a significant aspect of identity without, however, repudiating reason or embracing superstition. Frye's version of religious experience is built on the principle that a sense of spirituality may be recovered through an effort of imagination, and his work itself is the best evidence that such an understanding redeems faith as 'the emancipation and fulfillment of reason.' Of course, such an approach to faith will by no means satisfy everyone: for example, the role of imagination in Frye's theological ideas has led William Fennell to complain that Frye seems to deny 'the objective reality of God' (Theology and Frye/113-21). But Frye's argument is precisely that any experience that one might have of a god must transcend questions of subjectivity and objectivity, because the best means we have at our disposal for comprehending such an encounter is the word, and the word is metaphorical: hence the importance of understanding the relationship between the Bible and literature. The paramount concern mentioned at the outset of this Chapter had to do with the role of freedom in determining identity. In Frye's version of religious experience, the question is reformulated somewhat by identifying freedom with responsibility. In other words, Frye's spiritual outlook, far from striving to deny material experience, takes as its starting point the experience of the individual as a social being within a modern environment, and insists that any dependence upon passive assumptions about these surroundings is
ffectively a form of mental slavery. To escape this slavery it is necessary, first, to cultivate a sense of humility about one's passive assumptions and, secondly, to transcend such assumptions through critical thought within the framework provided by mythology. That framework is neutral insofar as it places any specific concerns within the totality of all human concern, and hence provides a vantage point from which the world may be reconceived by the creative imagination. The 'self-surrender' implicitly demanded by so-called spiritual outlooks is, therefore, inverted in Frye's version of religious experience; the spiritual insight is achieved by a separation of the active, truth-seeking imagination from the passive acceptance of illusion. Hence, liberation of the self is achieved, not through a simple, absolute denial of authority, but through a careful resurrection of the divinity latent in the human imagination. Freed from the clamour of personal and societal neuroses, the individual may once again hear a 'still small voice' through an encounter with the Logos, and the process of creating the world anew begins once again.