CHAPTER – 6

Conclusion:
Myth as meaning: the maps of interpretation
Theory, however elegant, cannot survive without a viable implication for practical reading of texts and a reliable strategy of explication inside the classroom. In spite of his obsession for grand system building and a passion for philosophical elegance Fry never lost sight of this basic truth. In fact the growth of his mind, as a critic has been inductive; he had evolved from the study of the particular to that of the general. His probe into Blake led him to his schematic understanding of literature and culture. A survey into his biography shows that all such understanding stems from Frye’s focused concentration on Blake’s poem on Milton. Originated thus from the particular Frye’s genius was never averse to actual textual analysis or study of individual authors. In fact, he has written expansively about Blake, Milton, Shakespearian comedy, Eliot and William Carlos Williams. For a long time, he acted as a reviewer in Canadian journals which reflect his views on Canadian culture and literature. In all such exercises Frye nuances his theories for a textual reading and allows the conceptual abstractions to be tempered and modulated by the compulsions of practical exegesis.
This chapter takes four such readings as representative cases of his acumen as a practical critic – his evolution and impact as a Blake critic, his commentary on Keats's Hyperion, his study of imagery in the poems of William Carlos Williams and his reviews of Canadian poetry.

II

For Frye, William Blake was a lifelong obsession, and Blake's works were for him a joy and a maze, an early obstacle to his professional advancement and the basis of his first book, and of archetypal criticism in general. In 1933, when he was twenty-one, Frye took a postgraduate course on Blake at University College in the University of Toronto with the distinguished Swift scholar Herbert Davis and he plunged into Blake's works with characteristic energy. By the spring of 1934 he was describing Blake as his 'only devouring enthusiasm' and the very next year he tried to persuade Helen Kemp that Blake was 'generally the greatest Englishman this side of Shakespeare.'

In February 1934, Frye had to give a paper in his postgraduate course on Blake's poem called Milton, but he got bogged down in The Four Zoas, the prophecy that Blake had written just before Milton. It was not until the night before the seminar that he got down to writing on Milton itself, and then, as he later recalled: 'At about two in the morning some very curious things began happening in my mind. I began to see glimpses of something bigger and more exciting than I had ever before realized existed in the world of the mind, and when I went out for breakfast at five-thirty on a bitterly cold morning, I was committed to a book on Blake.'
This was in 1934, when he was twenty-two years old, but thirteen years of struggle with Blake and with Frye's crystallizing system of archetypal criticism were to elapse before his 'book on Blake' was visible in coherent form. Frye began writing an MA thesis on Blake under the supervision of Herbert Davis, and he soon persuaded himself that he knew 'as much about him [Blake] as any man living.' His method of scholarly research on Blake, as he described it in a letter, seems to have begun rather like that of a terrier with a rat - but an intellectual terrier somewhat afflicted with adolescent hubris: 'I've spun the man around like a teetotum. I've torn him into tiny shreds and teased and anatomized him with pincers ... But what I have done is a masterpiece; finely written, well handled, and the best, clearest and most accurate exposition of Blake's thought yet written. If it's no good, I am no good. There isn't a sentence, and there won't be a sentence in the whole work that hasn't gone through purgatory.'(Frye to Kemp, 111)

Herbert Davis thought the draft of the thesis 'extraordinarily good' (Frye to Kemp, 111) but, despite years of struggle, Frye apparently never finished his MA thesis on Blake. For that matter, he never even embarked upon a PhD; though he eventually directed more PhD dissertations at the University of Toronto than any other member of the English Department, probably more than had been written at the University of Toronto English Department in all the years before he began teaching there. Already in the 1930s Frye was preaching the gospel of Blake to a tired, strife-torn, and bewildered world as the cure for religious, political, social, and cultural catastrophes. When Helen Kemp wrote to him in 1935 about the alluring arguments of atheism, communism, and materialism, Frye replied grumpily: 'Read Blake or go to hell: that's my message to the modern world.' And in the same letter he wrote of himself in terms astonishingly like those which were to be used by critics decades later about his book on Blake, indeed about his critical work in general:
"I know Blake as no man has ever known him - of that I'm quite sure. But I lack so woefully in the way of subtlety. I haven't got a subtle mind - only a pounding, driving bourgeois intellect. I don't insinuate myself between two factors of a distinction - I push them aside: if I meet a recalcitrant fact, I knock it down; which doesn't get rid of it, but puts it in a different position ... I resent criticism, because I don't know, in most cases, what the hell I mean myself, so how should anyone else pretend to do so? ... my criticisms are not, properly speaking, criticisms at all, but synthetic recreations. Professor Davis was kind enough, or ignorant enough, to remark that what he had seen of my theoretical reconstruction of Blake was a damned sight more interesting than the original, as far as the prophecies are concerned at all events ... This is one side of me - the synthetic intellectual. I'm a critical capitalist. The English conquered India ... with a handful of soldiers. I can sail into Blake or Shakespeare or St. Augustine or the Christian religion or aesthetics with two facts and a thesis, and I can conquer it. I may be baffled and obstructed: I may get stuck in a Black Hole, as I have been more or less for a year now; but I emerge with my territory painted all in one colour, anyhow. But if you paint everything one colour you oversimplify (114-15).

Frye struggled with the book on Blake, and particularly with *The Four Zoas*, while he was a student at Toronto, and then while he was a student at Oxford, and then while he was teaching in Toronto, but he could not manage to pull it together; it was ungainly, fearfully asymmetrical, without a governing synthesis. The idea of the Orc-Urizen cycle, the struggle between rebellious energy and controlling reason, the concept which became the central thesis of the book on Blake
and which gave the work its 'Fearful Symmetry' came to him, as his biographer John Ayre recounts, in 1942 'while sitting in the bored husband's seat in a women's wear shop on Yonge Street just below Bloor' waiting for his wife Helen to finish her Saturday morning shopping (Northrop Frye, 177). He immediately saw that this was the synthesis for which he had been searching, the idea which would draw together all the disparate strands of the book.

However, there were still years of work before he could integrate the idea and could organize the book. He immediately rewrote the book and submitted it in 1944 to a firm called Ambassador House, but even before he received their very belated rejection notice he had begun rewriting it. By March 1945 he had 658 pages of what he conceived of as a popular book on Blake, which he submitted to Princeton University Press, saying that it was 'complete and ready to print' except for footnotes (Frye to Smith, 191). The Press's literary editor immediately noticed that it had numerous 'side excursions into the nature of satire, the romantic poet the historic cycle, the epic, etc (McLachlan to Frye, 192). But she thought it was sufficiently promising to send to Professor Carlos Baker, a Shelley scholar at Princeton, for a professional opinion. Baker was both impressed and dismayed by the book; it was brilliant but disjointed, and it tried to accomplish far too much. In his reader's report he wrote:

'this book is full of the most acute perceptions and insights; he has gaiety and humor, aggressive wit, and a kind of gamy truculence ... [However, I doubt that this] seemingly interminable book will materially aid the cause of Blake after all. It requires as much of the reader as Blake's Prophetic Books themselves do ... [It is a] diffuse epic in prose ...'
treatise on the unity of western poetry; a treatise on Blake's critical opinions; and a dictionary of Blakean symbolism (Baker to Frye, 192, 193).

On the basis of this report, the Press replied to Frye with cautious encouragement, saying that the book might be more publishable if it were reorganized and purged of what seemed to be extraneous matter. With his usual 'pounding, driving bourgeois intellect' Frye set to work immediately on the revisions, cutting out chunks which totalled up to 170 pages, and he returned the revised version to Princeton University Press just four months later, in August 1945. This time Baker was enthusiastic; two months later the Press wired that it would accept the book; on 28 October 1945 Frye signed a contract; and seventeen months later, in March 1947, *Fearful Symmetry* was finally published.

*Fearful Symmetry* had been in gestation for thirteen years, from February 1934, when at the age of twenty-one Frye was first 'committed to a book on Blake,' until March 1947, when he was thirty-four and the book was finally published. *Fearful Symmetry* was not only Frye's first book, it was also his first significant scholarly publication. Before this he had written reviews and very short stories, but his published credentials were extraordinarily slight. He had no doctorate; for that matter, he had never finished his Toronto MA thesis. Before 1947, if Frye had come up for tenure at a distinguished American university without a very powerful patron, his contract almost certainly would not have been renewed.

*Fearful Symmetry* had an electrifying influence from the day of its publication. Within six months it had sold 1100 copies, an astonishing number for academic books which often have a
print run of no more than 500 copies. It was not only students of Blake who were dazzled, for *Fearful Symmetry* appealed to readers far beyond the narrow world of Blake enthusiasts or academic scholarship. In a review in *The Spectator*, Edith Sitwell wrote: 'The book is of extraordinary importance, not only for the light it throws on Blake, but also philosophically and religiously... It is a book of great wisdom, and every page opens fresh doors on to the universe of reality and... art.'(Ayre,205) And when Frye wrote gratefully to her she replied: 'at last we have the critic we have been waiting for'(206)

Blake's writings are the kernel from which Frye's system of archetypal criticism sprouted and flowered. Frye's analysis of Blake and his analysis of the nature of poetry were inextricably intertwined. He felt, obscure, at first, that if his system of analysis would work for Blake, it would work for all poetry, indeed for all literature and for culture in general. He experienced difficulties with *Fearful Symmetry* for over a decade partly because he could not seem to disentangle his analysis of the nature of Blake's poetic myth from his revolutionary analysis of the nature of poetry. It is significant that when Frye cut 170 pages from the penultimate draft of *Fearful Symmetry*, he did not throw them away; he kept them for another ten years of bondage, and much of the material went into *Anatomy of Criticism* which was not published until 1957.

In sum, Blake's writings were absolutely fundamental to Frye's development as a scholar, a critic, an academic, and a master thinker. In answer to a student's question, he once said, 'I've learned everything I know from Blake'('The Survival of Eros in Poetry' in Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism,32) and he believed that 'the keys to [all] poetic thought' are to be found in Blake's works('The Keys to the Gates' in Some British Romantics,8)
Blake scholars were dazzled from the first unheralded appearance of Frye as a critic of Blake, and the publication of *Fearful Symmetry* was taken as marking a new age in Blake studies. Thirty years later, in 1977, a bibliography of Blake summarized the consensus of Blake critics and the scholars:

'critical figure who dominates, and indeed defines, this period of Blake studies is Northrop Frye, whose *Fearful Symmetry* ... is probably the most comprehensive, learned, illuminating, and profound book on Blake of this or any other era. The orientation of the work is critical... but it makes full use of the best books and information which had preceded it. All Blake's literary achievements are synthesized into a work which has itself a gigantic and fearful symmetry. Blake's development is lucidly and wittily analysed, and the forces and influences which governed his work are displayed confidently and clearly; in particular, Frye finds that Blake was working in a tradition of archetypal symbolism, for instance in the Ore Cycle. As in any really compelling discussion of a work of art, the terms and arguments are complex in themselves, and the criticism is not unlike the original in density and profundity. The enormous merit of the book is the way in which vastly diverse details are subsumed into a directing purpose and understanding. *Fearful Symmetry* is a truly magisterial work. (Blake Book, 45)

The influence of *Fearful Symmetry* upon Blake studies has been massive and pervasive: every serious critical book on Blake since 1947 has referred to *Fearful Symmetry*, and many have been, in effect, based upon it. The most recent book indebted to Frye, and one of the most distinguished Blake books of recent years, is *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (1991) by his University of Toronto colleague Vincent De Luca, which is dedicated to Frye.
Among Blake critics, Frye has attracted a whole school of followers. Many of them were sometimes referred to as Small Frye, though in any other field they might seem very prominent indeed. His name is writ large with honour throughout the literature concerned with Blake. *Fearful Symmetry* is magisterial, synoptic, and comprehensive like strategic conclusions of a general surveying a whole intellectual war. However, Frye has also been a vigorous private soldier in the front lines of Blake scholarship. For years after the publication of *Fearful Symmetry* in 1947, Frye was remarkably active in Blake studies, giving lectures in colleges around North America, particularly in the bicentennial year of 1957, writing essays on individual poems by Blake, and reviewing all the scholarship and criticism about Blake in 1957 for the Modern Language Association of America, of which he later became president. In 1953 he prepared for the Modern Library *The Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, which is valuable for the introduction and notes.

In 1961 he edited his student Peter Fisher's book on Blake called *The Valley of Vision* after the author's premature death, and in 1965 he put together *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays* by various authors, in which the most valuable original contribution was his own Introduction. He wrote reviews of books on Blake, gave radio interviews about him, spoke on Blake at conferences and wrote an article on Blake for *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in 1967. For at least the twenty years after the publication of *Fearful Symmetry*, from 1947 until 1967, Frye paid his dues to Blake scholarship. Even some of Frye's essays that seem remote from Blake, such as 'Yeats and the Language of Symbolism' (1947), 'Quest and Cycle *Finnegans Wake*' (1957), and 'The Survival of Eros in Poetry' (1986), turn largely on Blake. A surprising amount of his work
is intertwined explicitly or implicitly with the ideas of William Blake. But of course it was *Fearful Symmetry* itself which continued to dominate the field.

The *Fearful Symmetry* has in many ways become close to orthodoxy in Blake studies. It has engendered opposition merely because it represents what is now conventional wisdom on its subject. For instance, in an essay called 'Delivering *Jerusalem*’ Karl Kroeber concluded that today Blake’s ‘poem needs to be delivered not from oblivion but from its Interpreters, particularly Frye.’ But a far sounder and more common judgment is that of Hazard Adams in his essay 'Blake and the Postmodern.' There he wrote: 'postmodernism ... is a criticism that seeks to answer the demands of modern art’ with its ‘principal immediate source' in 'the Blakean critical theorizing of Northrop Frye' (7). In sum, Frye's work has transformed the understanding of William Blake. In Blake studies, this is the Age of Northrop Frye.

III

As one moves from Frye’s criticism of Blake to his study of Keats, one starts journey from the modernist structures to the post-modernist openness. His hermeneutics of *Hyperion* turns out to be as affirmation of ambiguity and undecidability as tools, to assess the anxiety embedded in culture and literature. ‘The theme of Keats's *Endymion,*' says Frye in the introduction to his short book *A Study of English Romanticism,* ‘is the bringing to birth of the imagination as the focus of society' (89). The niche occupied by Keats's *Endymion* in Frye's schema of criticism is a minor
one - a single chapter in a relatively slight book of lecture. But since Frye chose to use Keats's poem to illustrate a moment in the evolution of the imagination, it seems that the commentary on *Endymion* offers a good testing-ground for Frye's theory in practice.

The chief assertion of this little book of Frye's on younger Romantics - Beddoes, Shelley, Keats - is that in Romanticism creative authority passes from God to the poet. The poet is the 'focus' through which a better vision of society is articulated. The poet, not the priest, becomes the vehicle for that 'myth of concern' as Frye puts it, which protests the present conditions of living. The poet, says Frye, sees society as held together by its creative power, incarnate in himself, rather than in its leaders of action. Thus he himself steps into the role of the hero, not as personally heroic but simply as the focus of society. For him, therefore, 'the real event is no longer even the universal or typical historical event, but the psychological or mental event, the event in his own consciousness' (SR, 36). He adds, 'In Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward ... a hidden region, often described in images of underground caves and streams' (33). After treating the Romantic macabre in Beddoes and the Romantic revolutionary in Shelley, Frye comes to his affirmative climax, the Romantic epiphanic (as he calls it) in *Endymion*. Frye is a religious critic, and the epiphanic, or showing forth of the divine, appeals to him more than Beddoes's death-drive or Shelley's Utopian atheism.

Frye's first move, as one would expect, is to map the worlds of *Endymion*, mostly by reference to Milton, Spenser, and Blake:
Endymion has been brought up in the garden world ... but the impulse to get away from it is present in him too. We notice a feeling of guilt in Endymion, of a responsibility not yet assumed, which pushes him out of his world into a lower one ... Endymion's society worships Pan ... The heaven of Endymion is therefore the place of Pan ... he [Endymion] is unable to go directly into the world of Pan and Phoebe above him, and has to go in the opposite direction, through the third and fourth levels of his poetic cosmos, ... associated respectively with earth and with water ... these lower worlds are also worlds of Diana, in her full extent as the great diva triformis. (133-5)

This brief summation has the virtue of placing Keats's poem in a long line of mythologically structured poems from Ovid on, poems which often include underground or the underwater episodes. Book II of *Endymion* happens under the earth and Book III happens under water. But Frye seems to think they happen in clear ethical contrast to Endymion's pastoral world or Phoebe's celestial one. It might be truer to say that, in *Endymion*, there appear to be only two worlds - the mortal and the immortal. There is no clear analogue to the demonic in either the underground or the underwater worlds of *Endymion*. The closest thing to the demonic is the vision of Circe in Book III. It occurs on an island in the very same pastoral world where Endymion is first seen and where Glaucus has lived before his underwater punishment.

In spite of one's feeling that Frye's four worlds make a rather Procrustean bed for *Endymion*, the very fat of Frye's reminding us that a poem of an earlier century might well fit more easily into four worlds makes us aware of Keats's originality. What is oddest about Keats's realms is how they shift. I Pan is the god worshipped by Endymion's society: But neither does the final
theophany - or indeed any of the intermediate ones - display him. Keats prefers, after the Hymn to Pan in Book I, to envisage Pan, or natural deity, under his submanifestations here as Venus and Adonis, there as Alpheus and Arethusa, or as Glaucus and Scylla, as Neptune, as Bacchus, as Cybele, as Cynthia and perhaps even as Circe. As the god of Allness, Pan must include all aspectual epiphanies. And yet Keats is not schematic enough to say this outright. There is in Keats a deep resistance to boundaries of the sort eminently congenial to Frye. Keats cannot get along without 'worlds' or 'realms' but they melt into each other as Endymion is translated from one to the next. The pastoral world is the roof of the ocean, and the Indian maid is now on the ground, now drawn through the air by winged horses provided by Hermes. Both death and resurrection inhabit the sea; both gems and ennui can be found under the earth. Frye himself, in his recognition of Diana as the *diva triformis*, might have suspected that the worlds in *Endymion* differ from each other only aspectually, not essentially.

As Frye retells the story of *Endymion* in brief, certain motifs oddly escape or contradict his formulations. He refers, for instance, in a baffled way, to a 'beautiful if somewhat inconclusive vision of Cybele' (*SR*, 136) in the poem; and he tries, to make a good case for Endymion's experience with the Indian maid: Endymion's possession of the Indian maid is for him what birth would have been for Blake's Thel, a new life which, although it is a form of death as every new life is, also gives him the roots in experience that he lacked before:

Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core

All other depths are shallow: essences,

Once spiritual, are like muddy lees,
Meant but to fertilize my earthly root. (137-8)

The passage that Frye here quotes from Book II as support for the beneficence of Endymion's 'possession of the Indian maid' refers not at all to the Indian maid (whom Endymion will not meet until Book IV) but to Cynthia. Endymion has just 'swoon'd / Drunken from pleasure's nipple' (II, 868-9) during his encounter with his unknown goddess, who has made frequent references to the sky (II, 761-824). Endymion, in consequence, reflects that the earth is now to him an inferior level:

Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core
All other depths are shallow: essences,
Once spiritual, are like muddy lees,
Meant but to fertilize my earthly root. (II, 904-7)

At this point, one needs to examine the reasons that led Frye to ascribe these early lines about Cynthia, denigrating the 'muddy lees' of earth, to Endymion's feeling for the earthly Indian maid. It was perhaps Frye's premature wish for the mythological conflation of the two love-objects. Though in the end they become one, only Cynthia is, indispensable; only she has the power to show herself aspectually in the person of the Indian maid, and to absorb, eventually, that earthly persona into her divine one. When Endymion tries to convince himself that he can be content with the Indian maid alone, he is acting inauthentically, as the narrator sharply remarks. Endymion at that point has vowed bitterly to abjure his quest for Cynthia:
No, never more
Shall airy voices cheat me to the shore
Of tangled wonder, breathless and aghast. (IV, 653-5)

And in the most inauthentic lines of the poem, he addresses the In maid:

My Indian bliss!
My river-lily bud! one human kiss!
One sigh of real breath - one gentle squeeze --

but breaks off even in the midst of the gentle squeeze to reproach his vanished Cynthia - 'Whither didst melt?' - only to return to domestic plans with the fair Indian: 'No more of dreaming. - Now, where shall our dwelling be?' (IV, 663-70) Endymion's temporary infidelity to Cynthia is sharply reproved by the narrator:

The mountaineer
Thus strove by fancies vain and crude to clear
His briar'd path to some tranquility.
(IV, 722-4; emphasis added)

It is important for Frye's social argument - his 'humanistic' reading of "Edymion-as-Thel -to have Endymion descend into the ordinary and domestic social world. But the thrust of Keats's poem goes precisely in opposite direction. It is a 'crude and vain fancy' to Keats's way of
thinking, to imagine that the domestic and social world can suffice. Therefore, Keats makes the Indian maid's earthly black hair and eyes metamorphose at last into the celestial golden hair and blue eyes of Cynthia:

Her long black hair swell'd ampler, in display
Full golden; in her eyes a brighter day
Dawn'd blue and full of love.
Aye, he beheld Phoebe, his passion! (IV, 984-7)

Endymion, who had 'wed [himself] to things of light from infancy' (IV, 17-8) does not find his ultimate destiny - as Frye wishes he would - in the social world of the Indian maid, but in the ethereal world of the goddess, with whom he vanishes at the end, leaving his sister to remain 'home' in the pastoral world of the 'gloomy wood' (IV, 1002-3). This is not a Thel-like descent on Endymion's part, but rather an apotheosis of the human soul into the divine. This ending does not fit Frye's program of human concern; nor, of course, does it ultimately fit Keats's own, since his final gods and goddesses - Apollo and Moneta - are far more burdened with human concern than the celestial Cynthia or Endymion in his eventual role as her consort. It is difficult for Frye to encompass the Keatsian irresolution of realms in his account of the poem, since Frye is himself so resolute in the realm of value. Yet Endymion is full of perplexity and its concomitant, Negative Capability. Here is the vision of Cybele, the earth-mother, which Frye has admitted to finding 'beautiful but inconclusive':

Forth from a rugged arch, in the dusk below,
Came mother Cybele! alone - alone -
In sombre chariot; dark foldings thrown
About her majesty, and front death pale
With turrets crown'd. Four maned lions hale
The sluggish wheels; solemn their toothed maws,
Their surly eyes brow-hidden, heavy paws
Uplifted drowsily, and nervy tails
Cowering their tawny brushes. Silent sails
This shadowy queen athwart, and faints away
In another gloomy arch. (II, 639-48)

Since this passage represents Keats's first sketch for Moneta - a majestic mother with 'front death-pale' - the appearance of Cybele can hardly be dismissed as inconclusive or (Douglas Bush's words) 'not clearly relevant' (Keats: Selected Poems, 320). The coloration of this striking passage is sombre, sluggish, solemn, surly, heavy, drowsy, shadowy, gloomy: these are the colorations of the Mother of the Gods and her entourage. She is the Demogorgon of Keats's poem, the mystery in which the generative maternal comes charioted by the bestial She is unclarifiable; perceived under the earth, she is also - though dimly glimpsed - the ground of being of the sky-goddess. She makes Keats's poem resist a Freudian reading in which Cybele would share attributes only with other females - since she is the mother of the male gods too. She has no consort, and therefore can make only a brief appearance in this narrative, which is so intensely centered on erotic relations. But her brief Miltonic passage ('silent sails / this shadowy
queen athwart') in *Endymion* will breed the moon-Titaness Moneta presiding over that later poem, *Hyperion*, which has given up all hope of the erotic.

After Frye has summarized Book II, he states that Circe is the presiding deity of *Endymion*'s lowest world, the hell under the sea (*SR*, 139). But Glaucus, a sea inhabitant, says explicitly that he met Circe in the upper world, on the island of AEaea. When Scylla fled his', Glaucus had hoped that his 'fierce agony' of desire would find help from Circe:

... across my grief

It flash'd, that Circe might find some relief --

Cruel enchantress! So above the water

I rear'd my head, and look'd for Phoebus' daughter.

AEaea's isle was wondering at the moon: -

It seemed to whirl around me, and a swoon

Left me dead-drifting to that fatal power.

When I awoke, 'twas in a twilight bower,

Just when the light of morn, with hum of bees,

Stole through its verdurous matting of fresh trees.(111,411-20)

It is in this bower, among the bees, that Glaucus sees Circe, who 'cradles him in roses' (II, 457); he finds himself in 'haunts umbrageous' (III, ) and wanders in 'the mazy forest-house / Of squirrels, foxes shy, and antler'd deer' (III, 468-9). This is no sea scene; and Circe in fact never enters the underwater world at all. After the bower interlude, Glaucus awakes and wanders till he
sees his 'arbour queen' (III, 498) surrounded by beasts (once men) whom she poisons. Glaucus flees, but Circe finds him, and condemns him to old age, immortal as he is, for a thousand 'ears in 'the watery vast' (II, 593). As he sinks into the sea, he refers to it; as 'my fresh, my native home,' whose 'tempering coolness, to my life akin, / Came salutary as I waded in' (III, 698-10).

All realms in Keats are innocent. Though Circe's forest can become, through her manipulation of men, both a 'specious heaven' and "real hell" (III, 476) to her victims, it is, in another of its aspects, the very forest for which Pan was praised in Book I.

Frye is right in seeking to describe Keats's ambitious construction of realms and to put them in relation to their mythological predecessors. This is necessary in order to establish how Romanticism reworks the mythology it inherited. But, perhaps, Frye overschematizes Keats's slippery imagining and overmoralizes his encounter with the Indian maid to exemplify a necessary domestic 'descent' and ascribes the ocean to 'Circe in order to represent one of Keats's worlds as a demonic one.

Frye says, interestingly, that 'Keats's attitude to this world is not moral, like Spenser's: it is rather, however unpoetical the word may sound, epistemological. It is the world in which the separation of the conscious subject from everything it wants and loves is at its greatest (SR, 139). Yet immediately Frye goes on, entirely accurately, to ascribe moral purpose to Endymion as he and Glaucus 'begin to transform a shipwrecked society into a reintegrated one' (143). One feels that Frye would have been happier if the poem had ended with Book III at this resuscitation of the drowned lovers. In a brilliant local insight, Frye sees that the scattering of pieces of Glaucus's scroll, resurrecting the dead lovers, substitutes for 'the traditional sparagmos fate of the god in
the underworld' (144). Though Frye leaves the Eucharistic \textit{sparagmos} unmentioned here, it could not have been far from his mind. And indeed Book III recalls the harrowing of hell - a place which was not the 'hell' but a place of waiting for the saved until the Redemption should be accomplished. The Keatsian underwater world is more purgatorial than demonic, and Circe has no place in it.

\textit{Endymion}, says Frye, is, like \textit{The Prelude}, 'a poem about the growth of the poet's mind (147). But for Frye it is an incomplete poem, and he passes on, at the end of his essay on it, to \textit{Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion}, and the great odes, in order to complete his conspectus of the Keatsians program. He had earlier mentioned the hymn to Bacchus in Book IV of \textit{Endymion} as a balance to the opening hymn to Pan (144) He returns to the hymn to Bacchus to point out that it is enclosed within the Indian maid's song to Sorrow (153), adumbrating Keats's later entwining of sorrow and joy in the 'Ode on Melancholy.' This is of course true; but, because Frye's mind is on psychology, he does not notice the more important aspect, for Keats, of the hymn to Bacchus: its 'contamination' of Greek mythology by an incursion from Asia. The Indian maid sings of Bacchus, and follows in his train, because he comes from her par the world; he rides surrounded by the fauna of Asia - the tiger, leopard, elephants, zebras, alligators, and crocodiles. Bacchus passes through all lands, according to the Indian maid:

\begin{quote}
I saw Osirian Egypt kneel adown
Before the vine-wreath crown! I saw parch'd Abyssinia rouse and sing
To the silver cymbals' ring! (IV, 257-60)
\end{quote}
'Old Tartary,' 'the kings of Inde,' 'Great Brahma' - all make obeisance to Bacchus, in stanzas reminiscent of the submission of the pagan gods to the Infant Christ in the Nativity Ode of Milton. When Keats hybridizes 'the beautiful mythology of Greece' with a maiden from beside the Ganges (IV, 633) and an Asian Bacchus, makes his poem into something wilder and less canonical than a pure adaptation of Olympus. Insofar as Cynthia needs to take on the persona of a maid from the Ganges, she needs new blood from outside the classical tradition - and so does Keats. This is a well-known historical complication of Romanticism, but it evades Frye's generalized concern with mythical worlds.

We can hear in Frye's comments his reservations about the extent to which - as he sees it - Keats's poetry distances itself from experience. The poetry of Keats as we have it is set against the world of experience, as something which is in that world but not of it. We see this particularly in Keats's style. 'The odes in particular depend on magic spells and charms, on the marking off of special holy places and the building of private temples in the mind, on escape from noise and vulgarity ... and on an intensely hieratic rather than a demotic consciousness' (154). One knows, in a large sense, what Frye means here. The odes were after all not written by Crabbe or even Byron. Frye sees the hieratic order in the odes as an elitist betrayal of Keats's ideal style, 'a style with the dramatic versatility of Shakespeare's'; and Frye accurately describes the 'uncertainties of taste' in *Endymion* to 'an attempt to develop a style without levels, which can encompass the sublime and familiar at once' (154-5). Yet Shakespeare also wrote the *Sonnets*, as hieratic a sequence as Keats's odes. One encounters, both in Frye's critique of the 'hieratic' style, and in his open approval of a style more 'demotic,' nothing of the Protestant colonial's distaste for a court style. After criticizing *Endymion's* putative arrest in a state of innocence,
Frye adds that 'Keats leaves us in no doubt that he wanted to develop further in the direction of a poetry of concern, a poetry that would incorporate the ironic vision and the state of experience ...' (156). In view of the appearance of the Den of Quietude in Book IV of *Endymion*, which represents a negative capability of detachment truly eerie in its chill, it is difficult to see why Frye suggests that *Endymion* remains a poem of the state of innocence. However, the experience it attains at its highest point in the Den of Quietude is one of separation from the anguish of the social world. For Frye, there is radically insufficient ethical content to such detachment. In the Den of Quietude, it will be remembered, the soul wanders and traces its own existence. This is indeed, in Keats’s own words, the 'native hell' (IV, 523) of the soul - if one is looking for a demonic passage in the poem. Yet Keats adds,

But few have ever felt how calm and well Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.

There anguish does not sting; nor pleasure pall;
Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,
Yet all is still within and desolate
Enter none
Who strive therefore: on the sudden it is won.

(IV, 524-32)

Ethical striving, no matter how arduous, cannot bring one to this state. 'Enter none / Who strive therefore.' It is not a place of revolutionary endeavour, nor of redemptive social imagination: it
is, one might say, not Protestant. And Frye's imagination is thoroughly Protestant. Keats's den is, perhaps, Lucretian; its presiding genius is Necessity. Frye's entire critical and religious stance was antinecessitarian; One is not aware of any statement of his that embraces some version of Keats's Quietude. It is too quietist for him. It would rob him of energy.

Frye retreats from his ethical critique of Keats through a rather tortured formulation. Keats, he says, ultimately envisages a world of communion for which the 'outer court of experience would not need to exist' (159). Keats's nightingale and urn, he says, might 'seem to us, at first, images of a poetry of refuge, a dream of a lost Paradise.' He continues, 'That is a possible but shallow response: the disciplined response understands that these poems are visions on and of the battlefield itself, not the subjective fantasies of retreat' (165). Frye's battle metaphor seems misplaced: *Endymion*, and the odes, do not envisage the world as a battlefield. *Endymion* is a quest-romance, and the odes are, as Frye says, epiphanic, presenting 'icons or presences which have been at once invoked and evoked by a magical spell, and held as a focus of meditation' (159). Perhaps it is true, as Frye thinks, that all realized poetry is the result of Blakean 'mental fight' - but it would be equally true to say, with Keats, that all realized poetry is conceived in the Den of Quietude.

The most interesting thing about Frye's forty-page essay on *Endymion* is that it seems to be heading straight towards a condemnation of Keats - for escapism, for solipsism, for hierarchic consciousness, for immaturity. Yet three-quarters of the way through the essay, Frye suddenly realizes the direction of his argument, and makes a sharp about turn: 'The inference seems to be that Keats was a minor poet who would have become a major one if he had had a few more years
of life and health. This seems very reasonable, except that every reader of Keats knows that it is wrong ... The mind that contemplates, the poet with his negative capability, is the focus of a universal human mind ... with which the poet identifies himself (156-7).

This formulation, which resorts to concepts like 'a universal human mind' makes all talk 'hierarchic' versus 'demotic' consciousness idle. It is as though Frye, himself, has come upon the decontextualizing aesthetic of the Europe lyric. *Endymion* is a prolonged lyric of 'one bare circumstance' -Keats said - rather than a narrative poem. In lyric, the lyric speaker not a 'character' at either a 'hieratic' or a 'demotic' level; he is, as Emily Dickinson said to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'representative.' When Frye arrives at the assertion that Keats believes in an 'interpenetrating' society (159), he seems to have forgotten his earlier separation of 'worlds.' "'They interassimulate,'" says Keats, 'in a inspired portmanteau word,' Frye adds (159). This is an insight that would be worth applying to the shifting scenes of *Endymion*. Just as the 'bower of *The Fall of Hyperion* becomes Moneta's shrine, which the dissolves into the shady sadness of a vale, so Endymion's restless adventures are perhaps nothing but successive backdrops, 'interassimilated' to the one philosophical mind.

Frye's essay bears some marks of haste and con sequential rather than planned spatial composition. But Frye had the courage to see where his conceptualizations of *Endymion* were leading him. He had the wisdom to rely more strongly on his readerly experience of Keats's greatness than on his mythological sense that Keats was immature. At the end of his essay, he even allows Keats's writings more moral than epistemological force. This is the very opposite of his initial presumption.
It is worth examining, at this point what Frye leaves out. Most of Book IV, with which he seems to be uneasy, remarking that 'there are signs of impatience and of a desire to begin again with the story of Apollo' (146-7). The Den of Quietude, as said earlier, goes unremarked. Yet the Den lies squarely, in a Spenserian way, at the centre of Book IV, and may be said to be its climax. It follows Endymion's repeated 'perplexity' (IV, 439, 447) at his double infatuation:

What is this soul then? Whence
Came it? It does not seem my own, and I
Have no self-passion or identity. (IV, 475-7)

Though Endymion flies off with his 'swan of Ganges' (IV, 465), she fades at dawn and he drops to earth, to the Den of Quietude, where he leaves identity and grief behind and comes to a centre of indifference. It is there he learns to remain in a state of perplexity without any irritable reaching after certitude. This ironic ambivalence in the reading of the Keatsian text shows the suppleness of Frye's theoretical postulates and proves the flexibility with which he can move out of, perhaps beyond, rigid critical attitudes and positions. The sympathetic reconciliation with the the 'uncertain; and the 'irreducible' is manifest in his latter writings, though it was always latent in his early vision: and, this what opens up his ideas to the Post-modern concept of the aporia.
OF all Frye's practical criticism, the most helpful to the reader is his analysis of the almost opaque poetry of William Carlos Williams: only a mythographic key can offer access to the maze of such poetry by way of untangling the skein of its imagery. One wonders at the way in which William's recalcitrant poetic expressions yield to the critical proddings from Frye.

In the Western tradition, as Frye sees it, a metaphoric structure of imagery based on the primary concern of sex is organized around the garden-body metaphor that in the Bible is found in Genesis and the Song of Songs, 'especially,' as he notes, 'in the verse "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed"... Here the bride's body ... is identified with the gardens and running waters of a paradise ... sexual union suggests fertility, and the bride's body is metaphorically identified with vineyards, gardens, flowers and the awakening of nature in spring' (WP, 196). An illustration of this metaphoric structure is Williams's poem 'Queen-Anne's-Lace,' which begins, 'Her body is not so white as / anemone petals nor so smooth' and describes a field of wild flowers metaphorically as a female body that has 'blossomed' under the loving touches of a male consort (Collected Poems, vol. 1, 162). Williams often pursues the metaphor in ironic awareness of its conventional nature, as in 'Portrait of a Lady/ where the structure of a 'detailed description of the heroine's body' (MM, 49), based on the famous blazons in the Song of Songs, is self-consciously thematized and deconstructed. Another poem 'To Mark Anthony in Heaven' illustrates the importance of erotic love in defining the male poet's relationship to the world around him. The poet muses on the 'quiet morning light' entering his room and thinks of sexual love, metaphorically identifying 'trees and grass and clouds' - in other
words, the entire natural environment—with the 'beloved body' of Cleopatra that Anthony worshipped. He hopes that Anthony saw her, 'above the battle's fury/'from slanting feet upward / to the roots of her hair/ for then, having won approval for his steadfast devotion to Eros, he would be 'listening in heaven' (Collected Poems, vol.1:124-5).

The celebration of Eros, in one way or another, is arguably the central theme in Williams. It accounts for the importance of the imagery of a renewed nature that so pervades his work. Titles of volumes such as Kora in Hell, Spring and All, and The Descent of Winter point quite explicitly to the importance of a mythological framework of seasonal imagery, and within that framework springtime is clearly associated with the theme of ascent through love. Birds, trees, and especially flowers, are everywhere. In the opening pages of the original Prologue to Kora in Hell, Williams offers an example of a truly 'fresh creation/ one which illustrates the ability to see 'the thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with great intensity of perception: it is a painting by A.E. Kerr 'that in its unearthly gaiety of flowers and sobriety of design possesses exactly that strange freshness a spring day approaches without attaining an expansion of April' (Imaginations, 8-9). This is a typical matrix of imagery for Williams, and it is worth noting how he characteristically links vision with the reawakening of nature and the growing light in springtime. The ability to open one's eyes and see the world anew is by the same token linked to love, and specifically sexual love. Williams consistently associates light with Eros, as in the light entering the room in 'Mark Anthony in Heaven/ or the 'Holy light of love' extolled in The Mental Hospital Garden/ or the closing 'celebration of the light' in The Asphodel, That Greeny Flower.' Not surprisingly, perhaps the single most important archetype in Williams's poetry is that of the garden. The central image of The Asphodel, That Greeny Flower' - the central argument of
which concerns the renewal of the poet's love with his bride, whose forgiveness he seeks for his infidelities - is the transformation of the sea, associated, among other things, with the sterility of old age and the impending chaos of death, into a garden, associated with springtime and the blooming 'sexual orchid' of erotic love which restores us to what Andre Breton, in his own great hymn to Eros, *UAmour fou*, calls 'la jeunesse de la sensation' (72):

There had come to me

a challenge,

your dear self,

mortal as I was,

the lily's throat

to the hummingbird!

Endless wealth,

I thought,

held out its arms

A thousand tropics

in an apple blossom.

The generous earth itself

gave us life.

The whole world

Became my garden!

But the sea

which no one tends
is also a garden when
the sun strikes
and the waves
are wakened.

(Collected Poems, vol. 2:313)

Williams, then, finds himself in a long tradition of poets who, to use Frye's words, 'preserve and emphasize the metaphorical identity of the bride's body and the garden, which enables them to associate sexual emotion with visions of a renewed nature' (WP, 198). He pays homage to this tradition in the closing passage of The Asphodel' by evocatively quoting the refrain from Spenser's *Epithalamion*, a poem, as Frye points out, which 'paraphrases from [the Song of Songs] at some length' (198).

The imagery of rejuvenation and of a renewed nature associated with the Eros is dramatized in Williams's poetry by the myth of the rising of Kora or Persephone which runs throughout his work. In this myth of springtime, as Frye summarizes it, 'the mother figure [Demeter] is linked to the old crop and the daughter [Persephone] to the new one' (WP, 203). The myth is so attractive to Williams because it supplies him with the kernel of the structure of imagery in his poetry. His first volume of writing was entitled *Kora in Hell*, and he explains the choice of title in *Wanted to Write a Poem*: 'We [Williams and Pound] had talked about Kora, the Greek parallel of Persephone, the legend of Springtime captured and taken to Hades. I thought of myself as Springtime and I felt I was on my way to Hell (but I didn't go very far)' (29). In 1957, in the
Prologue to the City Lights Edition, he remarks upon the myth again, and again metaphorically identifies himself with Persephone as the goddess of Springtime.

The Kora theme is succinctly developed in the opening passage of 'The Asphodel.' The significance of this flower, besides its rather ordinary appearance (a positive feature, of course, for Williams), is that, in classical mythology, it grows in hell, and, like Persephone, reappears in the spring. The garden-body metaphor is thus underlined through the identification of Kora-Flossie (Flossie is Williams's wife) with the flower of hell.

I have invoked the flower
in that
frail as it is
after winter's harshness
it comes again
to delect us
Asphodel the ancients believed
in hell's despite
was such a flower.
With daisies pied
and violets blue,
we say, the spring of the year comes in!
Let me, for I know
you take it hard,
with good reason,
give the steps
if it may be
by which you shall mount,
again to think well
of me.

(Collected Poems, vol. 2,325-6)

Williams thus fuses the myth of the rising of Kora with that of Eurydice, led from hell by Orpheus, and joins them to the theme of the ascent through love, in which the aspiring poet-lover is drawn upwards by the 'female principle of the world'. This is identical with, as Frye points out, Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche*, which is evoked by Williams at the end of 'For Eleanor and Bill Monahan,' a poem written around the same time (Collected Poems, vol. 2, 255). The Prologue to *Kora in Hell* is subtitled the 'Return of the Sun,' and its epigraph is three lines of verse depicting the Kora-like figure of a maiden, a clear embodiment of springtime: 'Her voice was like the rose-fragrance waltzing in the wind. / She seemed a shadow, stained with shadow colors, / Swimming through waves of sunlight' (Imaginations, 6). In the opening passage of the same work, the poet's mother (about Whom, significantly, Williams was later to write a poem entitled 'Eve') is described as someone who, in her innocence in being taken advantage of by men, 'might be living in Eden. And indeed she is, an impoverished, ravished Eden but one indestructible as the imagination itself' (7). The use of the word 'ravished,' as well as a certain semantic ambiguity allowed by the syntax ('and indeed she is, an impoverished, ravished Eden'), suggests that the
association of the woman and Eden is more like a metaphoric identity. The garden-body here, if not exactly enclosed, is at least in some sense inviolable, 'indestructible as the imagination itself.'

The image of ravishment suggests the violent abduction of Kora or Persephone. Given the subsequent description of the poet's mother in the same part of the text as 'a despoiled, molted castaway' (8), touches on that other dimension explored by Frye 'in which woman expands into kind of proletariat, enduring, continuous, exploited humanity, waiting emancipation in a hostile world' (WP, 215). In *I Wanted to Write* Poem, Williams speaks of his mother's influence on his writing and of her ordeal as a woman and as a foreigner in this country. I've always held her as a mythical figure, remote from me, detached, looking down on an area in which I happened to live, a fantastic world where she was moving as a more or less pathetic figure' (16). A distinct mood of pathos surrounds those female figures in Williams who occupy what Frye describes in *Anatomy* as a suppliant position, who present 'a picture of unmitigated helplessness and destitution' and are often 'in the structurally tragic position of having lost a place of greatness' (217). The presentation of women as exiled and oppressed is a dimension particularly relevant to the theme of love in Williams's poetry. We might call it the 'Kora in hell' phase - as opposed to her rising - exemplified by 'Beautiful Thing', the girl from the slums in Book 3 of *Paterson* who is battered in a fight between rival gangs.

The imagery of flames in this section of the poem associates her with 'Hell's fire' making the Kora theme explicit: 'Persephone / gone to hell, that hell could not keep with / the advancing
season of pity' (125). The poet-lover is throughout Williams's poetry depicted as someone who identifies with women and sympathizes with them in their state of exile, subjection, or exploitation. These women range from the lonely and abandoned, as in 'The Widow's Lament in Springtime' to the sexually exploited, such as the stripper in Juarez in 'The Desert Music' to the working woman removing a nail from her insole in 'Proletarian Portrait.' 'I give you instead' the poet declares at the end of *Paterson*, 'a young man / sharing the female world / in Hell's despight, graciously' (238).

The ravished Eden inhabited by the poet's mother is as 'indestructible as the imagination itself' and she in turn seems uncannily able to retain her innocence in spite of repeated disillusionment. This capacity is related to the theme of rejuvenation, specifically to the theme of the mother who grows young and becomes a bride. In Jungian terms, as Frye points out, 'Psychologically, the rejuvenation of the mother is and internalizing and assimilating of a mother figure' (WF, 203). This explanation sheds considerable light on the significance of Williams' identification with his mother. 'I was personifying her' (*I Wanted*, 16), he says about her early influence on his artistic sensibilities. The presence of this theme in his writing also accounts for the importance of the figure of the crone. As a Demeter or Naomi figure - Frye's biblical equivalent of the Persephone myth being the story of Ruth - the crone stands for the end of the cycle, the 'old crop' as it were, as Ruth or the rejuvenated Persephone stands for the new. The most obvious example of such a figure is the poet's muse in *The Wanderer* Williams's early poem of poetic calling, shows the influence of Whitman's great chant of vocation, 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking'.
The creative figure in 'The Wanderer' is a 'marvellous old queen/ hovering in rags'. Metaphorically married to the Passaic river, she is the symbolic mother of the poet, involved in a miraculous late birth which, like Sarah's in the Bible, suggests rejuvenation:

Here the most secluded spaces
For miles around, hallowed by a stench
To be our joint solitude and temple;
In memory of this clear marriage
And the child I have brought you in the late years.

(Collected Poems, vol. 1,117)

Like the figure of Kora, this figure haunts Williams's poetry, and he returns to this early poem at the end of his career in the closing passages of Book 5 of Paterson. Evoking the image of the ouroboros, 'the serpent / its tail in its mouth' (233), which suggests a completed and self-renewing cycle, he introduces verbatim material from the closing section of 'The Wanderer.' The appearance of the poet's English grandmother at the end of Paterson is heralded by the cawing of crows in February, the last month of winter. This recalls the earlier poem where the crone makes her first appearance in the form of a 'young crow' (108). His grandmother,

did not want to live to be

an old woman to wear a china doorknob
in her vagina to hold her womb up — but
she came to that, resourceful, what?
He was the first to turn her up
and never left her till he left her
with child ... *(Paterson, 238)*

Bringing into focus her despoiled fertility, this graphic imagery puts her at the antipodes of that other female figure who dominates this closing on of the poem, the maidenly lady of the 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestry, an allegorical type of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin, of course, is traditionally associated with the *hortus conclusus* or enclosed garden. Indeed, the importance in Williams's later work of the figure of the Holy Virgin perfectly illustrates the 'theme of the ascent of love' in one of its ultimate modalities. It is the return, in Frve's words, to 'a childlike state of ecstatic union with the mother, or, in more traditional religious language, as a nostalgia for the lost paradise of Eden' (*WP*, 217). This can be seen clearly in the imagery based on 'a metaphorical identity between a paradisal environment and a female body' (195). This we find in a poem such as 'For Eleanor and Bill Monahan,' which is devoted to the 'Mother of God! Our Lady!' Her ecstatic union with her celebrants, and her figurative children, is depicted as a return to an earthly paradise:

that impossible springtime

when men
shall be the flowers
spread at your feet.

As far as spring is
from winter
so are we
from you now.

(Collected Poems, vol. 2, 253)

Section 3 of Book 5 of Paterson opens with an extended description of Brueghel's painting of the god of love lying 'naked on his Mother's knees' (226). In Pictures from Brueghel, 'The Adoration of the Kings' repeats the scene, centred on 'the Babe in its Mother's arms' and 'the downcast eyes of the Virgin' (Collected Poems, vol. 2, 387-8). The poem 'The Gift' is an expression of the same complex of imagery, a celebration of the Nativity, in which the gifts proffered by the wise men, which 'stood for all that love can bring,' are miraculously transmuted as they gaze upon 'the god of love' nursing at his mother's breast: 'A miracle/ had taken place, / hard gold to love, a mother's milk!' (Collected Poems, vol. 2: 430-1). In all cases, the depiction might just as well be that of Venus and Cupid, confirming Frye's observation that 'one consistent form of the quest of love appears to be the journey to identity with the god of love as child, whether the infant Jesus in the arms of his mother or the infant Cupid frolicking around Venus' (WP, 217-18).

In the same vein, a significant portion of Book 5 of Paterson consist of imagery inspired by the 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestry at the Musee de Cluny, the theme of which is the allegory of
'the hunt of the unicorn and the god of love of virgin birth' (233). In the tapestry, the repeated details of a fenced-in circular bed of trees and flowers enclosing the lady and unicorn is an explicit icon of the enclosed garden. Williams emphasizes the garden imagery, the unicorn being seen 'against a millefleurs background/ by cataloguing the flowers that are crowded into the different scenes' (231). One of the details described in this section of *Paterson* concerns a young woman whose 'rare smile' is detected 'among the thronging flowers of that field where the Unicorn is penned by a low wooden fence' (232); another, hinting at the annunciation, presents a woman demurely hid 'among the leaves, listening/ her face expressive', to 'the blowing of a hunter's horn' (237). Williams, of course, represses none of the sexual connotations of the imagery throughout this closing section of the poem.

The preceding, very schematic reading of the conventions of erotic in Williams is far from exhaustive. However, it goes some way towards demonstrating the value of Frye's treatment of imagery. The lack of a systematic attention to imagery continues to be a weakness in the analysis of literary works. The new theories are enormously skilful at deconstructing texts and revealing manifold contradictions, and have grown remarkably adept at analysing them in the most nuanced ways as reflections of the ideological, political, and cultural limitations of their historical moment. But when it comes to the treatment of something as fundamental as imagery, too often one finds oneself working with old tools and thus the treatment remains impressionistic and speculative. Imagery speaks its own language, but as long as it is turned out, as though it were a foreign thing, one will remain in ignorance of one the most significant dimensions of poetic communication. One lasting contribution of Frye's work is to have given us the ability to hear
and understand this highly structured, semiotically organized language in all complexity and
detail.

The topic, here, is not Frye and Canadian culture; there is no attempt to discuss the skill with
which he relates Canadian literature, historically and geographically, to its social and natural
world. The concern, here, is simply with those annual surveys of newly published English-
Canadian poetry which he wrote during the 1950s, and, even there, not with the occasional
cultural aside, but with his main business, a practical reviewer's account of the assorted poetic
stuff to be found within the covers of a lot of particular books.

Such practical reviewing of poetry right off the press occurs with one minor exception,
nowhere else in Frye. Such unprecedented, start-from-scratch, narrowly focused nature of the
job at hand causes Frye to tap the furthest back, the most deep-rooted, of his resources and
prejudices as a reader of poetry, the ones his critical career starts with. Well before these
reviews, in that extraordinary 1942 essay called 'Music and Poetry,' such Frye basics stand out
unmistakably, and they achieve their most notable repetition and development in the first half of
Anatomy's Essay 4, where he discusses the verbal rhythms of genres. Comparatively speaking,
these pages have been discussed very little. One reason for the neglect is that Frye's analysis of
the various patterns of verbal texture needs supplementing with his editor's preface to the Sound
and Poetry collection of the same year, with The Well-Tempered Critic of 1963, and with the
'Charms and Riddles' essay of 1975.
The concern here, is not to paraphrase Frye's overall argument from these places, but rather to point out how basic to his early criticism, and persistent later on, is that quasi-Aristotelian *melos-lexis-opsis* scheme with which he leads into Essay 4, and then to demonstrate how some of the scheme's distinctive, even idiosyncratic, qualities stand out in his Canadian reviews, even if the terms themselves are not used. The scheme sets the musical rhythm and motion of *melos* against the imagery and stasis of *opsis*, and puts the diction, idiom, and level of usage of *lexis* in between. But there is an obvious pro-melos and anti-opsis bias. Of course the scheme, even that bias, has plenty of analogues elsewhere in *Anatomy*, but here it stands in its most immediate relation to verbal texture and to the musical concerns of that seminal 1942 article.

To start with the bias against *opsis*, hearing certainly dominates seeing in Essay 4, as Hamilton has emphasized (*Northrop Frye*, 163-8) and at times seems to absorb it. Then the imitative harmony and onomatopoeia, and even stanza forms on the page, are included to bolster the meagre pickings of *opsis*. The term's connections with any natural images of sight are minimal.

The Frye who grew up against a background of modernist poetry and criticism discovered at an early age strands in them that he liked to react against. Imagism was one of these, with its supposed preference for precise visual imitation. His reaction can be found in many places; but T.S. Eliot's 1936 put-down of Milton's ear-dominated eye was a favourite target (*SP*, xxii). 'Imagism/'Frye says in that connection, 'threw a strong emphasis on *opsis*, and began an almost consciously anti-musical development' (*SM*, 142). Milton's 'musical myopia' is Frye's later parody of Eliot's view. But he makes fun not just of imagistic criticism, but also of the way poets practise their imagism, which turns out to have little of the visual precision they claim.
All this is reflected in Frye's Canadian reviews. Alfred Bailey's imagistic urges prompt Frye to feel 'tired of the critical cliche that everything in poetry should be hard, concrete, and precise' and to insist that 'you can make good poetry out of diffused, muzzy, and generalized language' (BG, 18). On Dorothy Livesay's early version of imagism, he comments wryly, 'the virtues of this idiom are not those ... that the imagists thought they were producing [but] those of gentle reverie and a relaxed circling movement and on her later version, 'the dangers of imagism are facility and slackness' (84-5). In A.J.M. Smith, Canada's own modernist poet and critic, 'the poetry is intensely visual and conceptual ... but it does not dance' (37). D.G. Jones is at his best 'when he is less preoccupied with visual design and lets his rhythm work itself out' (80). When Miriam Waddington (and others) are praised for 'precise observation the observation is almost always social not 'intensely visual' (37). There are, of course, exceptions to this nonvisual emphasis, like the praise of Louis Dudek for his 'quality of... wet water-colour' (63). However, the modernist strand that most bothers Frye in Smith is not imagism but the metaphysical conceit. 'Mr. Smith has the reputation, says Frye, 'of being a metaphysical poet in the tradition of Donne and his 'learning perhaps does interfere with his spontaneity' (BG, 36-7). Donne's high reputation among up-to-date (and usually anti-Romantic) poets and professors during the twenties and thirties never seems to have meant much to Frye. In the very first of these Canadian reviews, he writes of James Wreford: 'Metaphysical poetry is not a good influence on him' (2). High praise for Earle Birney's Trial of a City or P.K. Pages's The Metal and the Flower does not prevent him from complaining about 'a few gingerbread conceits' (17) in the one and about 'a conceit... squeezed to a pulp ... or dragged in by a too restless ingenuity' (39) in the other.
A poem by Patrick Anderson 'belongs to that dreary metaphysical interregnum from which poetry now seems to be slowly recovering' (24). In a kind of paradox, the poet praised for the undissociated sensibility ascribed to the metaphysicals by Eliot is the very un-Donnian James Reaney. But when Anne Wilkinson speaks of a snowfall as 'Immaculate conception in a cloud / Made big by polar ghost/ he just calls it 'bad metaphysical poetry' (5). Frye's practical literary ideal (exemplified in Blake's basic unsophistication, despite the elaborate superstructure) remains a kind of popular simplicity, especially in lyric poetry. Observe how he introduces the Anderson review: 'the technical development of a modern lyrical poet is normally from obscurity to simplicity ... he is likely to pass through a social, allegorical, or metaphysical phase. Finally... the texture simplifies, meaning and imagery become transparent, and the poetry becomes a pleasure instead of a duty to read' (22-3)

But Frye's anti-opsis negatives can be overwhelmed by pro-melos positives. He explains at length how Reaney's wide-ranging versification 'puts on an amazing technical show' (BG, 89). But instead of Frye's frequent rhythmic analyses, It is rewarding to turn to a more distinctive aspect of his pursuit of melos: a fondness for metaphorically reproducing in his own prose a poem's characteristic tone and rhythm. It is a very longstanding fondness. I quote from a revised version of a 1942 passage: 'when we find sharp barking accents, long cumulative rhythms sweeping lines into paragraphs, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, the spluttering rumble of long words, and the bite and grip of heavily stressed monosyllables, we are most likely to be reading a poet who is being influenced by music' ('Music and Poetry/ 169). Here Browning is the evidence at hand. But Blake's septenarian lines get similar treatment, climaxing with 'the machine-gun fire of auxiliaries and prepositions' (PS, 184). Frye is obviously
delighted to find that Blake's hero of the imagination, Los, centres his activity on 'the rhythmic clang of the hammer' (FS, 292), and that even as engraver Blake focuses on the rhythmic movement of that 'bounding line' (FS, 97). In the Canadian reviews when Frye describes 'the percussive vocabulary and wrenched syntax, the pounding and clanging of monosyllables' (BG, 106) in Heather Spears's *Asylum Poems*, we are reminded of those earlier descriptions.

But sound patterns can stimulate Frye's tropes even more inventively. One can think of Fred Cogswell's 'clumping sonnets with rhymes like typewriter bells' (118), of how Alfred G. Bailey's 'accents stick spikily through the metrical feet' and how 'he pulls the last syllable of the line off its stem, like a child picking flowers' (17); of Douglas LePan's 'barbed-wire entanglement of rhyme' (27). Very different, but related to the same melos-sensibility, is a comment on Jay Macpherson: 'her melody is of that shaped and epigrammatic quality which in music is called tune' (73).

It is true that a few of Frye's rhetorical distinctions from Essay 4 may be implied in his reviewing practice. But, *Anatomy's* fondness for sweeping and schematic critical categories of other kinds can hardly be ignored. A further, related question might be regarding the exact nature insights available through myths and archetypes. Systematic and explicit organizing principles are relatively rare in these surveys, and when tried they are usually perfunctory and rarely maintained. Of course abstract schemes meet at least some resistance in that early criticism whose relevance needs to be assessed. They become fully naturalized, even compulsive, as Frye's theoretical urges develop, but are nevertheless for him a kind of acquired taste. It is as if he was gradually coming to terms with Blake's systematic 'excess.' In his 1963 essay *The Road*
of Excess,' Frye remembers one of his marginalia in his undergraduate edition of Blake. A striking passage of schematic, indeed geometrical, imagery in *Jerusalem* nevertheless includes the phrase 'going forward.' Frye's antistasis note reads, 'something moves, anyhow.' Even in *Fearful Symmetry* his uneasiness about Blake's 'I must create a system' has to be eased by an understanding that it cannot be what Blake rejects as 'mathematical form' (*FI*, 231). In a 1947 essay he thinks disparagingly of Yeats's commentary on Blake as 'an overschematized commentary full of false symmetries' which 'includes all the Euclidean paraphernalia of diagrams, figures, tables of symbols and the like' (*FI*, 232). For a single example from his Canadian reviews of how symmetry can be less than thoroughly applied, one can turn to the survey of 1955. Frye starts it with an extreme simplification of patterns currently being assembled for *Anatomy*. "Poetry... has two poles/ he asserts, one 'formal' and the other 'representational and then includes as many relevant aspects as he can think of under each (BG, 44). In due course he divides up the four important volumes of new poetry two and two. Wilfred Watson and Anne Wilkinson are more formal, while Miriam Waddington and Irving Layton (a remarkable pairing) are more representational.

Let the focus now be on how this works for Layton. At the end of that polarizing introduction, Frye has already started to blur the distinctions between his poles, and even before he gets to Layton, he has dropped 'representational' for based on 'personal experience' (BG, 46). As the practical reviewing of *The Cold Green Element* proceeds, aspects more suited to Frye's formal pole flood in, culminating in 'the ironic personal myth' of the title poem, with its 'hanged god... torn apart and distributed through the landscape which turns out to be 'the same image as that of [Wilkinson's] central poem' (53). Frye likes to try out categorical distinctions on Layton ('not a
saturist at all, but an erudite elegaic poet according to an earlier review [41]), but when he gets to the collected edition of 1959 he just uses a kind of listing of all the very heterogeneous things a poet can do (116-17).

Then there is the second question. Frye's most familiar reputation is as a mythopoeic critic. The study now tries to focus on the extent to which these reviews exemplify it. His favourite mythopoeic ingredient is that rhythmic plot-movement he calls *mythos* and uses with such outstanding results in defining the arguments of comedy and romance. The lyric poetry that dominates these reviews offers little scope for such *mythos*. To be sure, when the opportunity comes, with E.J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, Frye seizes it and, despite the fact that the poem's rhetoric has very limited appeal for him, enters enthusiastically into its unclimactic kind of narrative without narrative (BG, 11-12). Displaying what Eli Mandel calls 'uncanny ... prescience he sees Pratt's version of *mythos* as a foretaste of technical problems for the long poems that come after the fifties ('Northrop Frye/289). Birney's large-scale dramatic poem, *Trial of I a City*, provides a related opportunity.

The lyric dominance means that Frye will usually see myth only in its static shape, rather than with its active movement, i.e. as archetypes or symbolic levels, not as *mythoi*. These ingredients may represent a less deep-rooted part of Frye, but during the fifties they were being vigorously pursued by him in the aftermath of *Fearful Symmetry* and for the sake of the imminent *Anatomy of Criticism*. As reviewer Frye finds them very convenient for an opening outline of the themes
and conventions that make up a poet's particular world. He tells us that Page's symbolism operates on three levels, comprising (imagistically) the sea at the bottom, 'angels and abstract patterns a in white' at the top, and inbetween, a 'level of metal and flower, rose garden and barbed wire' (BG, 39). These are not exactly the levels of that great chain of archetypal being that he presents in the first half of Anatomy's Essay 3, but they belong recognizably to the same world. On the sword and the net in the title of LePan's collection, Frye hangs an introductory explanation of its overall symbolic design (26). Daryl Hine's brief and still immature collection, The Carnal and the Crane, is paid the compliment of a subtle and lengthy definition of its incarnation-surrounded underworld in the context of a wide range of classical and Christian archetypes (76-8). The review of Wilfred Watson's Friday's Child is mainly taken up with defining the elaborate archetypal pattern of his two worlds (real and intelligible) and of their apocalyptic reconciliation (46-7). In many such outlines (although not with Page certainly) the archetypal description is at the expense of the rhetorical criticism: which (along with the action of mythos) are supposed to be part of Frye's deepest stratum.

The skilful simplicity of Watson's handling of his conventional design is praise. But, apart from one line called 'breath-taking' (48), the many quotations are not there for the quality of their utterance. Similarly, Frye moves from the 'richly suggestive intelligence' of Ronald Bates's pattern in The Wandering World to what is nevertheless 'unsatisfactory' in the texture of his writing (115). When he does find the texture satisfying, Frye may avoid attributing too much of the poetry's value to its explicit mythopoeia. This reluctance comes out most obviously in the pages on Macpherson's The Boatman. While Frye spends a good deal of time defining the context of particular myths within which the book achieves its formal existence, he also, as in an
earlier Macpherson review, emphasizes myth as container of the poet's personal and literary emotion, as 'reservoir of feeling' (56). Mythic self-consciousness for either poem or reader is minimized. Her 'myths/ he writes, flow into the poems: the poems do not point to them' (74). Myths may be echoed, 'but the lines are not dependent on the echoes, either for their meaning or their poetic value' (75). Presenting the poet of The Boatman as a learned poetic mythographer is precisely what he is not trying to do. He finally stresses, not her 'density/ but a 'timeless' and 'transparent' 'style' (74).

'Style' leads on back to those basic rhetorical distinction. Little is said about lexis, the middle and most loosely defined member of Frye's trio of terms It is the place where melos and opsis mingle with each other a It centres on diction, idiom, syntax, voice - on stylistic level of usage. It is being invoked when Frye finds Raymond Souster's epigrams, 'usually so successful in their concerned but objective social observation of the submerged strata of urban life, sometimes being spoiled by a'grousing' (BG, 62) reflective voice, by 'the moral exasperation that paralyses every comment except the most obvious one' (97). He has similar things to say about the intrusive flatness of the reflective voice in certain of Louis Dudek's poems (53-4). After a melos account of John Heath as a jazz pianist whose harmony is more striking than his rhythm,

Frye shifts to idiom and syntax, describing how 'most of the protective grease of articles and conjunctions is removed and subject, predicate, object, grind on each other and throw out metaphorical sparks' (104).
Frank Scott 'has brought to a high level of technical competence a kind of meditative musing poem through which the longer words of ordinary speech ripple with great colloquial freedom' (38).

His account of Reaney's cycle-of-the-year pattern and metrical range in *A Suit of Nettles* does not (in Frye's words) leave 'space ... to dwell on the innumerable felicities of the writing' (90). But a long quotation about one barnyard creature, he cannot resist. His comment on its rhetoric unites the *melos* of 'final spondees... used so persistently' and the *lexis* of 'tricks of inverted constructions' with the fluttering or zigzagging or upside-down-hangin *opsis* of a bat. Here are charms and riddles indeed. Frye's response to tone of voice and level of usage comes out with special sensitivity on George Johnston's *The Cruising Auk*. It exists throughout the review, even when he is ostensibly summarizing Johnston's overall patterns, but it is underlined at the end. Frye especially praises 'his ability to incorporate the language of the suburbs into his own diction. He does not write in the actual vulgate, but he manages to suggest with great subtlety the emotional confusions behind the pretentious diction and vague syntax of ordinary speech ... Or the elusiveness of large ideas as their shadows pass over an inarticulate mind' (112).

The last of many comments on Irving Layton is a *lexis* one: 'if one tires of anything,' Frye writes, 'it is, perhaps, the sense of too insistent a speaking voice, and of being never out of listening range of it ...There is a great variety of theme... but little variety of tone' (117-18).

In the retrospective paragraphs that end his last annual survey, Frye sees evaluative comparisons with the great works of other times and places as not what these Canadian reviews are trying to
offer (BG, 126). Yet they do contain plenty of sharp critical judgments. While his mythopoeic criticism allows him to enter a poet's world, but does not necessarily push him to do much more, his deep-rooted rhetorical criticism always seems to be there to take up the evaluative slack.