

## FRYE'S MODERN CENTURY RECONSIDERED

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In an article entitled "Canadian Character in the Twentieth Century," John Porter argues that the Canadian archetype or identity is "negative." While he traces the origins of the negative archetype to the "ever present crisis of English-French relations" and to the fear of being "swallowed up" by the "overwhelming power of the neighbor to the south," Porter finds the negative archetype manifested in Canadian literary culture: "Canadian poets have been found to express a melancholy, a feeling of resignation to misery, isolation and the feeling that man is 'encompassed by forces beyond his ability to control which strike out repeatedly and blindly to destroy him.'" Heroic action is seen to be futile, and literary subject matter finally becomes so removed from life that one finds only the "residue of personal values, personal relationships and private worlds — worlds of gloom and despair at that."<sup>1</sup> Howard Mumford Jones claims that Northrop Frye's vision in *The Modern Century* is an expression of such negativism in general about man in the twentieth century. Frye's statements are seen to be too sweeping and to be derived from a humanist or literary bias: "It is simply not true that the disillusionment of some artists of the first rank and of thousands of pseudo-artists verifies the picture of society as a monster devouring its children. All it verifies is what this society means to a relatively minor fraction of the population." Indicating further the limitations of the arts to reflect life and the dark glass through which<sup>1</sup> Frye apparently peers, Jones confidently sets the beneficent power of business and technology against the humanist's imagination: "If Mr. Frye will cease to take his authors like Gide and T. S. Eliot at their own valuation and look into the activities of the Standard Oil Company and its affiliates in, say, Venezuela and Columbia, he will discover an intelligent economic and social concern for backward nations."<sup>2</sup> Frye, however, does not claim that literature reflects life; instead it grows

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<sup>1</sup>John Porter, "Canadian Character in the Twentieth Century," *American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, March 1967, pp. 52-53. See also Robert L. McDougall, "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk," *Canadian Literature*, No. 18 (Autumn 1963), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Mumford Jones, rev. of *Modern Century*, *English Language Notes*, 6 (1968-69), 233-34.

primarily from previous works of literature and it points not so much to the local or temporal as to the universal, especially toward humane possibilities which are never fully realized. More of this later.

Quite a different kind of attack upon Frye's "negative" vision, his "negative capability," is seen in George Grant's "The University Curriculum." Here Frye is attacked not because he presents a vision of the futility of modern life but because as a "non-evaluative analyst" he has sold the humanities out to the sciences. Although Grant recognizes that rigour and clarity have been brought to the humanities by scholars like I. A. Richards and Frye, he concludes that "non-evaluative analysis cuts men off from openness to certain questions." To illustrate, while one might "anatomize the similarities and differences in what [two] authors say about sexual 'values' . . . the most important question cannot be raised within the study; that is whether de Sade or Tolstoi is nearer the truth about the proper place of sexuality."<sup>3</sup> While Frye's kind of criticism permits a limited kind of academic mastery, it supposedly leaves man impotent before the ultimate questions of truth and goodness. Nonevaluative analysis becomes to Grant, then, an unassailable "academic fortress," removed from life and irrelevant. Indeed if one were to read only Frye's "Polemical Introduction" to the *Anatomy of Criticism*, he might have to agree with Grant, for after having drawn a parallel between literary criticism and a primitive science which has not yet established itself as an independent academic discipline, Frye argues that progress of the discipline depends upon the recognition that "it is in fact a totally intelligible body of knowledge. . . . Total literary history gives us a glimpse of the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture."<sup>4</sup> Here literary criticism verges upon anthropology and presumes a removed, restricted, and aboriginal body of thought. Especially then as Frye ridicules the "ethical critic" who trusts too much in his own taste and especially as Frye dismisses most criticism as mere unprogressive chit-chat, one can see why Grant might blame Frye for sacrificing value judgements for the sake of an arid intellectual mastery.

But in reading *The Educated Imagination* and *The Modern Century*, one does not really find a "non-evaluative analyst" or "dehumanized scientist"; instead it is clear that Frye is working

<sup>3</sup>George Grant, "The University Curriculum," in *The University Game*, eds. Howard Adelman and Dennis Lee (Toronto, 1968), pp. 60-61.

<sup>4</sup>Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (New York, 1969), p. 17.

polemically from a basic set of assumptions and working toward an ethical prophecy. Indeed, at times Frye sounds like a religious fundamentalist. Note his huge claim for the power and comprehensiveness of the Bible: "everything else finds its place inside it."<sup>5</sup> Can we really accept that the biblical narrative which moves from Genesis, the story of our creation, to Revelations, the story of our end, surveys or contains the whole history of mankind? Are we indeed to take the Bible as a mythic and prophetic account which lays out the groundwork of existence for all time? Certainly as one reads the last paragraph of *The Educated Imagination*, he will be struck by the odd combination of biblical and liberal perspective: on the one hand, man seems a creature caught in a necessary pattern of events; on the other, man is a free agent who can see and shape his own destiny. One may also be puzzled by the ambivalent tone: is Frye's witty application of the tower of Babel serious or whimsical?

The particular myth that's been organizing this talk, and in a way the whole series, is the story of the Tower of Babel in the Bible. The civilization we live in at present is a gigantic technological structure, a skyscraper almost high enough to reach the moon. It looks like a single world-wide effort, but it's really a deadlock of rivalries; it looks impressive, except that it has no genuine human dignity. For all its wonderful machinery, we know it's really a crazy ramshackle building, and at any time may crash around our ears. What the myth tells us is that the Tower of Babel is a work of imagination, that its main elements are words, and that what will make it collapse is a confusion of tongues. All had originally one language, the myth says. That language is not English or Russian or Chinese or any common ancestor, if there was one. It is the language of human nature, the language that makes both Shakespeare and Pushkin authentic poets, that gives social vision to both Lincoln and Gandhi. It never speaks unless we take the time to listen in leisure, and it speaks only in a voice too quiet for panic to hear. And then all it has to tell us, when we look over the edge of our leaning tower, is that we are not getting any nearer heaven, and that it is time to return to the earth.

It will be useful later to compare the rendering of this myth to the utopian myth of the tiger and the lamb lying down together at the close of *The Modern Century*. In the meantime one can discover what seems to be a core of belief.

The Tower of Babel is obviously related to Frye's representation

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<sup>5</sup>Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto, 1963), pp. 45-46.

of man as a Robinson Crusoe shipwrecked upon an island, separated from society, surrounded by an unfamiliar or alien nature, and estranged from his own human nature. The image of the marooned man points to man's experience of fragmentation, of both his internal and external worlds being in pieces. With the myth of the Tower of Babel, life among the ruins would seem to be explained as the aftermath of a foolish self-reliance, man's effort to impose a narrowly rational control over his destiny, the kind of control found in Blake's monster, Urizen. The positive note in this basic myth is everyman's desire to restore his lost but ever possible dream of identity. In the meantime, we live in the world of Blake's tiger, in a crazy ramshackle building like that found at the opening of Kafka's *Castle*; a false or temporary structure surrounds us and seems about to fall or to open up into an abyss. And yet as Frye plays over apocalyptic possibilities, his voice remains wryly yet humourously hopeful, a voice or vision appropriate to the ending of comedy. There is supposedly available to us then "one language," "the language of human nature," a meaning or an order available to us only when we are in a genuine state of leisure, quietly receptive to "a voice too quiet for panic to hear." And what does it have to tell us? In the last sentence Frye can be found at his most gnomic, serious and yet whimsical: "All" the voice "has to tell us" — and here the colloquial syntax would seem to indicate that there is really *very* little or no more than a simple truth to be said — all the voice has to tell us is "that we are not getting any nearer to heaven, and that it is time to return to the earth." Indeed, biblical myth has warned man repeatedly to return to his proper human condition or to suffer the fall again. But note Frye's clever innovations: Frye's Tower of Babel is modulated wittily into its modern equivalent, the space ship, and modulated again into an unstable leaning Tower of Pisa. If one remembers that *The Educated Imagination* was originally delivered as a series of talks on the CBC, the "coming down to earth" might imply as well the parting shot of the scholarly intellectual who realizes that communication should mean not only transmission but also reception and response: has anyone out there been listening and following? Anyway, return we must to the mundane.

So far I have argued that Frye's response to our mundane world is not simply "negative"; rather than being concerned exclusively with works of art in relation to each other, he is concerned as well with art in relation to man's condition. Indeed he speaks to us in a voice which seems richly and comically prophetic. One must not,

however, exorcise the devils which are to be found in Frye's writing but must grasp their place and function. The opening chapter of *The Modern Century*, "City of the End of Things," can be read as a nightmare in which the demonic possibilities of modern man are explored and are set ironically against the nineteenth-century dream of progress. It is as if indeed the mindless idiot of Archibald Lampman's poem were the anti-hero of Frye's myth: in Lampman's prophecy, the dreams of science and progress end with the industrial machine displacing man. Bionic men ("they are not flesh, they are not bone, / They see not with the human eye, / And from their iron lips is blown / A dreadful and monotonous cry"), chess-like masters ("set like carved idols face to face"), and a final sinister silence after the industrial machine has run down — these become the inheritance of Lampman's survivor: "One thing the hand of time shall spare, / For the grim Idiot at the gate / Is deathless and eternal there."<sup>6</sup> Like Lampman, Frye shows optimistic dreams of progress metamorphosing into nightmares of impotence. Perhaps in part it is the very grimness of this metamorphosis (and not just his typical Canadian awareness of the larger world outside Canada) which turns Frye away from the small "family party," Canada's Centennial celebration.<sup>7</sup> Certainly Frye's representation of modernism makes nationalism seem merely quaint, antiquarian or neurotic; modernism becomes an overpowering world-wide movement absorbing all particular nations, indeed not only Canada but also the United States.

Frye's main focus, then, is upon the modern experience of progress. What he pictures is a violent speeding up that eventually leads not to a faith in a better world through science and technology and not to exuberance but to panic as one loses his trust in "unconscious growth" and sees instead a vast and dynamic process, a change to no ideal "end of things." Frye employs the apt image of a vehicle speeding out of control in the night, a carriage which gradually reflects back only our own bright images or images of our own making, a moving prison in which, in our helpless state, we are all too prone to give ourselves up to any bright illusion, anything that might save us from a full realization of our plight in which a visible present is forever being sacrificed to an invisible future and in which the final destination may well be the destruction of mankind (p. 28).

<sup>6</sup>Archibald Lampman, "City of the End of Things," in *Confederation Poets*, ed. Malcolm Ross (Toronto, 1969), pp. 75-77.

<sup>7</sup>Frye, *The Modern Century* (Toronto, 1971), p. 13.

Generally *The Modern Century* debunks the myth of progress as Frye unravels the nightmare possibilities in it. But Frye is already pointing to an exit from the nightmare as he distinguishes two alternative attitudes toward our condition, the active and the passive. The "passive" may be seen in the "squares" or bourgeois who have something to gain from the existing social contract and who thereby take appearances for reality; or the "passive" are represented as the frightened traveller in the carriage who for mental security insists upon taking the bright reflections upon the carriage window as reality and who resents any attempt to break through such illusions. The "active" are related in the next chapter to "revolutionary realism," that attitude which insists upon tearing off or smashing through the projected illusions of the timid. Hope then lies in a paradoxical disillusionment which implies a transcendence of the previous optimism and even perhaps of the current pessimism. Frye's "three A's" of alienation, anxiety, and absurdity bring us to a condition of revulsion: since it is then impossible to fall in love with our own images or myths, the hope is that we do not give ourselves up to the carriage or prison of illusion. Even here, however, Frye shows an amazing "negative capability" as he is arguing that it is human perception, human bias, and human willing that account for our destiny. The danger of the active attitude is that it can become automatic and clichéd: the man who has wound himself up into a pitch while unaware that he is reading the desperate news of a year ago feels a sudden descent and feels the unreality of his concern when he sees his mistake. Man, like George in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as he forces his wife to confront the illusion by which they have been living, "can murder his imaginary child, but the destruction of illusion does not bring him reality, for the only reality in his life was contained in the illusion which he denied." Finally, however, this chapter ends with a cautious hope: "as long as man is capable of anxiety he is capable of passing through it to a genuine human destiny" (pp. 48-49).

In Chapter II, "Improved Binoculars," Frye's focus might seem to be exclusively upon modern art, but his concerns continually go beyond art to a "genuine human destiny." To Frye, art and leisure are much more than a Veblenesque game — "leisure demands discipline and responsibility . . . to face the test of one's inner resources" (p. 89). His notion of art seems, for example, much more serious than Ortega y Gasset's depiction of art as "an entertainment, a game, a diversion," or of the artist's having a "cheerful, hearty and

even slightly waggish air that is peculiar to sport.”<sup>8</sup> In Ortega’s *Dehumanization of Art*, art, culture, and reason become merely means by which existence is perpetuated, things of no consequence in themselves. Ortega’s artist is neither the unacknowledged legislator of Shelley nor the prophet of the Bible but instead “the great god Pan” who “cut[s] whimsical capers,” who “instills youthfulness into an ancient world” where “the young goats frisk at the edge of the grove.”<sup>9</sup> Frye’s humour is much more dry and quiet and seems to proceed from a modest sense of proportion, especially when in Canada’s Centennial year he notes (in an oddly serious and whimsical fashion) the willingness of Canadians to concede the existence of the rest of the human race. And while one might see Frye lightly and dispassionately describing virtually all our serious beliefs as “mere” myths or projections of concern, yet one can find a sentimental journey in *The Modern Century*, a serious questing through the nightmare world projected in modern culture — hardly the same world of levity that Ortega y Gasset represents — towards an ever larger vision and hope. Time is not something to be played with or “passed” but is instead a medium through which man, the pilgrim or questing hero, aspires to a larger existence. Frye himself, as he quickly connects diverse images and illustrations into ever larger patterns, seems to move his argument in a spiral toward an ever larger vision of man’s capabilities.

In the second chapter, Frye continues to examine the nightmare possibilities of progress, especially the effects of disillusionment upon the contemporary thought, style, and culture of all nations. Against the attempts of many reactionary thinkers and nations, Frye argues that the modern is not to be blamed upon any single nation or source: “America is a province conquered by the international modern much more than it is a source of it” (p. 52). Furthermore, any nation seeking cultural maturity through an inturnd, nationalistic policy is bound to fail. The seed of cultural generation is not spontaneous nor, it would seem, guaranteed by government intervention. Instead “poems and pictures are born out of earlier poems and pictures, not out of new localities, and novelty of content or experience in such localities cannot produce originality of form” (p. 57). So much for Canadian cultural nationalism.

What then is the modern international movement? Frye traces

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<sup>8</sup>Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme* (New York, 1961), pp. 82-83.

<sup>9</sup>*Dehumanization of Art* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 49-52.

the development of European art away from the reproduction of static objects and toward the modern identification of the human mind with the processes or forces working through nature and society. "Revolutionary realism" becomes the "revolt of the brain behind the eye against passive sensation." By contrast, photographic realism becomes mere "stupid realism" which uncritically takes appearances for reality. The dynamic energy of the modern style is suggested through a quick catalogue of "propulsive movements," in Shaw's seeing the dance of the atoms in Beethoven, in the lilting and racing rhythms of Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy," in Shelley's images suggesting hydroplanes, and in modern design generally, the "clean spare economical and functional lines of a swiftly moving vehicle" (p. 65). The modern movement is in large part a dynamic rebellion against the passive and the static, especially the unseeing and conforming stupidity of the "realist" who attaches himself to the dead but vestigial forms of society, "the whole structure of society itself . . . an anti-art, an old and worn-out creation that needs to be created anew" (p. 86).

Frye's history of western culture culminates in his portrait of the artist as rebel hero, the revolutionary (or perhaps protestant) realist whose purpose is to tear aside the dead forms and to bring the real blood of life back into the body artistic. On the one hand, Frye traces the course of anarchistic primitivism by connecting American figures like Rip Van Winkle, Natty Bumppo, Thoreau, Chaplin, etcetera. Frye's allusion to Frederick Philip Grove's *Search for America* as a search for the "submerged community" below the unrealities and betrayals of daily life (p. 77) is related surely to Frye's fairy tale motif of sleeping beauty which he sees as the base of Rousseau's belief in the natural goodness of man; it is a dynamic and anarchistic image of mankind awakened from the sleep of an inauthentic civilization. The pastoral hope that man can be rooted again in a natural soil is traced variously through Wordsworth's "Michael," Kerouac's "struggle for innocence which is almost pastoral," and Lawrence's representation of man's having "a sense of identity with nature" (pp. 80-81). Through these restorations of man's natural identity, through these escapes from the "repressive anxiety structure" of society, Frye foreshadows his own vision of man's authentic condition. What we shall see later is a cooled-down version of revolutionary realism in Frye's reworking of Blake, but what he points to now is the modern artist's nostalgia for "an invisible serenity which has disappeared from contemporary life but can be re-experienced through tradition" —

Yeats's vanished gods, Lawrence's dark gods, Eliot's tradition, Jung's and perhaps Frye's own archetypes (p. 82). But the world in which the rebel artist lives is Stephen Dedalus's world of "silence, exile, and cunning," the world of "criminal exile." Therefore along with Rousseau's image of man as sleeping beauty coming to life through the kiss of Prince Charming, Frye points to the Marquis de Sade's awakening of a lust for violent pleasure, this becoming the "order" of the day. Various versions of the "holy sinner" are found in Dostoevski, Gide, Camus, Leroi Jones, and Mailer: in Lawrence, "a curious hysterical cruelty. . . . out of hand"; in Genet, society as a "vast sadistic ritual" (pp. 84-85).

In this survey of revolutionary realism, one may be struck by the strangeness of Frye's detachment and may wonder whether Frye is sympathetic to these wildy protestant and anarchic forces. For a time it may appear that Frye is wholly in agreement with freedom derived through the irrational: "wherever we turn we are made aware of the fact that society is a repressive anxiety structure and . . . creative power comes from a part of the mind that resists repression but is not itself moral or rational." This preconscious and irrational mind will later be related to Blake's world of the tiger, but for now Frye seems to warn about the dangers of riding or giving oneself up to the tiger in ourselves: "Such forces [bucking and plunging] are in all of us, and are strong enough to destroy the world if they are not controlled through release instead of repression" (p. 86).

Frye's attitude toward these dionysiac powers is clarified in the last chapter, "Clair de Lune Intellectual," which explores the relation of the arts to the leisure institutions and which suggests that the rebel artist, the anarchic outsider, has been domesticated by the leisure institutions — the French-Canadian artist homed in the CBC, the English-Canadian artist homed in the university. Moreover, as museums have generated an implosion of artistic periods and styles, the artist has become more eclectic, more detached and more open to the importance and possibilities of design, especially the spontaneous yet impersonal design found in "primitive" arts. Again, the impersonalization or depersonalization of the arts has been brought about through the contemporary university; the university has not only become a mass medium distributing the arts to the many but, by its very nature, it has cooled the arts by bringing about a detached response on the part of the young: "Study, as distinct from direct response, is a cool medium, and even the most blatant advocacy of violence and terror may be, like Satan in the Bible,

transformed into an angel of light by being regarded as a contribution to modern thought" (p. 105).

It becomes increasingly clear that Frye's message is a liberal one not unlike Trudeau's in *Federalism and the French Canadians* where separatism is equated skeptically and satirically with Nazism, where "chez-nous" means merely the closed society of a claustrophobic wigwam, and where the good man is the cosmopolitan man who remains forever open to the world while checking and balancing himself carefully on a tight rope of existence.<sup>10</sup> The "bad man" becomes the reactionary: "The truth is that the separatist counter-revolution is the world of a powerless petit bourgeois minority afraid of being left behind by the twentieth-century revolution. Rather than carving themselves out a place in it by ability, they want to make the whole tribe return to the wigwams by declaring its independence" (p. 211). Frye's representation of the "closed mythology" corresponds to Trudeau's closed society. In traditional Western mythology, a synthesis of the Bible and Aristotle, man is contained by a "total myth," a closed world in which God is seen to be the origin and end: "Man was a subject confronting a nature set over against him." But since both man and nature are the creations of God and "united by that fact," reason can grasp the design in nature. In addition, closed mythology becomes a "structure of myth" which requires "theoretical belief from everyone, and [which] imposes a discipline that will make practice consistent with it." As such, a mythology is seen to be superior to scholarship, since it "contains all answers at least potentially"; and since an elite is seen to be necessary for the maintenance of such a mythology, Frye sees both medieval and Marxist mythologies to be closed (pp. 116-17). The implications of "open mythology" would now seem clear: in democratic society (or mythology) everyone belongs to an elite of his own special skill or knowledge; there is no general canon or creed which must be approached deductively or practised publicly; reality or man's possibilities and potential are always seen to be larger than man's imaginings. The connection between religion and the arts, then, is not that of a creed or a series of Arnoldian touchstones; instead religion is received by the arts and by modern man as "an imaginative structure which, whether 'true' or not, has imaginative consistency and imaginative informing power." Thus as "religion

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<sup>10</sup>Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto, 1968), p. XIII.

deals with transcendent conceptions . . . religion [may] turn out to be what is really open about an open mythology" (p. 120).

I think then that Frye has prepared us well to receive his final prophecy which is worked out of the Bible and Blake. It should be clear that we ought not to expect a mere disciple of either the Bible or Blake; both are cooled, are made remote and tentative, as Frye would seem to avoid the trap of Blake's Moses-like Urizen who would

7. . . . . on  
This rock place with strong hand the Book  
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude:
8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity,  
Of peace, of love, of unity,  
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness;  
Let each chose one habitation,  
His ancient infinite mansion,  
One command, one joy, one desire,  
One curse, one weight, one measure,  
One King, one God, one Law.<sup>11</sup>

Frye provides a cool, temperate, and ironic frame for Blake's mythology; he creates a reality which seems much less fiery and satirical than what Blake suggests in the "Songs of Experience," in the raging spirit of Fuzon, or in the celebrations of energy and anger in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." Here in the comic "Marriage," the Devil in final dialogue with the Angel insists that "no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue and acted from impulse, not from rules." As a consequence Blake's Angel is teased into fury, is transformed into an angry prophet, and thereby reunited ironically with the "virtuous" Christ or the Devil: "Note: This angel who is now become a devil is my particular friend; we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well."<sup>12</sup> Frye it seems to me gives us such an imaginative and free ("infernal or diabolical") reading of the myth of man's restored identity. The devil and angel, the tiger and lamb, are brought together finally in a vision which is supposedly always before us but never achieved in

<sup>11</sup>William Blake, "The Book of Urizen," in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York, 1967), p. 84.

<sup>12</sup>William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *English Romantic Writers*, p. 75.

our life, except perhaps in literary or religious utterance. Frye, however, differs from Blake in his greater tentativeness or whimsy. Indeed, one might well ask whether Frye is signing off with a final Trudeau-esque shrug as he leaves us the paradox of a "something to be found that has not been found, something to be heard that the world is too noisy to let us hear," the real Canada meaning etymologically "nobody here" or an "ideal with nobody in it." In these paradoxical terms, we owe our loyalty to "the Canada that we have failed to create," like Blake's Jerusalem that England has not yet become. Finally, "the uncreated identity of Canada may be after all not so bad a heritage to take with us" (p. 122-23).

Seeing these paradoxical last words, one might well ask how something not yet in existence can possibly be termed a "heritage"? The answer lies in that favourite image of Frye's, the removed or forgotten identity, our preconceptions of the "buried or uncreated ideal," Rousseau's noble savage sleeping beneath and yet potentially beneath the tyranny of a dead civilization, the fairy tale of sleeping beauty. This motif does indeed suggest that ever within us, behind us, and before us we have the possibility of human greatness. Frye suggests that there is a fundamental paradigm of existence to be found in our literature, a paradigm which may yet guide us in our present and future. This prophetic paradigm is found in Frye's survey of modern literature in general and in particular Blake's world of the tiger and the lamb. Despite Frye's paradoxical pointing to the incompleteness of Canadian mythology or identity, through his quick and sure handling of Blake's images he suggests surely that Blake's vision, his "Songs of Innocence and Experience," do have application to our condition: in "The Lamb" the child can confidently answer that "Christ made the Lamb because he is both a lamb and a child himself, and unites the human and the subhuman worlds in a divine personality," for the child "assumes that the world around him must have parents too." In such a parent- and child-centered world, the "lions and tigers can enter only on condition that they lie down with the lamb, and thereby cease to be lions and tigers" (p. 120). Blake and Frye, however, are not simply visionary, for both point grimly to the fact that we live not in the world of the lamb but in the world of the tiger, "the subhuman world, a world in which things evolve and in which man seems the only creative power." The image Frye resorts to is like Pratt's images of cold-blooded sharks and dragons: like the cold iceberg most of which is submerged in the "destructive elements," we are much better at destroying than

creating. Our world of "experience" then cannot be renovated unless "some shadow falls across it of the child's innocent vision of the impossible created world that makes human sense" (p. 121). Our better world, the possibility of transcending our brutish condition, the achievement of the divine can only, it would seem, be achieved through the child's sense that this "world was created for us by a divine parent" (p. 120-21). Such a world does not exist — or exists only in our "culture" — but Frye makes it clear that our highest loyalties must be directed toward the ongoing realization of such an imagined world of love.

It is for these reasons then that Canadians are fortunate not to have devoted themselves to the "closed" world in which they live. Frye's "golden world," however, is much more remote and tentative than that found in Sidney's "Defence of Poetry." We are left finally like Tantalus with the waters of regeneration forever before us but only, it would seem, achieving satisfaction imaginatively, not physically: "our identity, like the real identity of all nations, is the one we have failed to achieve. It is expressed in our *culture* but not achieved in our *life*" (p. 123, italics mine). Had Ortega y Gasset seen this sharp distinction between "culture" and "life," he might well have remarked upon Frye's being a typical utopian rationalist abandoning the here and how of human existence. To Ortega, the error of rationalism is to see thought, spirit, or culture as distinct from the material world of existence and action; there is "no culture without life, no spirituality without vitality."<sup>13</sup> In Frye's conclusion, however, while one finds indeed incomplete man striving after ever larger being, Frye expresses a faith in the elusive divinity of man, the hope that the child-like and "irrational" faith may yet be kept and applied in a world of brutal cynicism. Frye's conclusion, then, is most unlike George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*, a melancholy and angry depiction of the tragic fall of Canada where Canada appears to have been destroyed by the dynamic power of American culture and politics: to Grant, the "modern" brings Canada to an "age of senescence." Whereas Grant's hope finally comes to rest upon a permanent, but removed order, the kind of transcendent order one might expect of a Christian Platonist, Frye's hope comes to rest upon the child's faith that the world is his parent, a faith that may survive into and even transform our adult world of experience. Thus Frye

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<sup>13</sup>*Dehumanization of Art*, p. 44.

finally brings us to a resolution which is subtle, playful, and yet comic in promise: the world of a more complete identity, if not completed identity, forever lies within us and before us. He seems then to promise an "age of rejuvenation"<sup>14</sup> as through our culture the seed of rebirth is forever cast before us and may yet take better root. The archetype of *The Modern Century* then is positive in that it indicates the possibility of a better human world.

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<sup>14</sup>*The Modern Theme* (p. 18). Ortega y Gasset sees the various generations of mankind taking either one of two attitudes: an "age of rejuvenation" is a period of youthful rebellion and renovation and is "modern"; the "age of senescence" is a period of conservatism or complacency. Porter's and McDougall's depictions of the Canadian "negative archetype" (images of dying fish, darkness, and absorption) correspond nicely to Ortega y Gasset's colouring of the word "senescence."