

Northrop Frye's Shakespearean Criticism

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A central irony of Frye's Shakespearean criticism is that Frye never really resolved independently to write a book on Shakespeare: the initiative always came from somewhere else. *A Natural Perspective*, his book on the comedies and romances, came out of the 1963 Bampton Lectures at Columbia University. *Fools of Time* originated as the 1966 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto. *The Myth of Deliverance*, on the so-called problem comedies, was the 1981 Tamblin Lectures at the University of Western Ontario. And his most recent Shakespeare book, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, was transcribed from tapes of Frye's course for undergraduates. There are, of course, things other than the four books, the chief of which are listed in the appendix, but most of these were also written at the suggestion of someone else. "Romance on short notice was her specialty," says Saki about the little girl in his "The Open Window." Producing a lecture or even a book on short notice was Frye's specialty, and no critic, I think, was quite so obliging as Frye when it came to honoring requests to produce a manuscript.

Still, Frye's theories of Shakespearean comedy and tragedy did not originate out of nothing. His three essays from the late 1940s and early 1950s on Shakespearean comedy were incorporated into *Anatomy of Criticism* and so form an integral part of his theory of criticism. There are, not incidentally, 203 references to Shakespeare in the index to the *Anatomy* (far more than to any other writer), and thirty-two of the thirty-seven plays, as well as the sonnets, *Venus and Adonis*, and *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, receive explicit mention in the text of the *Anatomy*. The earliest reference I find to Shakespeare in Frye's writing is in an essay on music he wrote when he was twenty-two. In this piece, published in 1938, he says that "Shakespeare proved by means of [cosmological music] that a man who was tone deaf would be out of tune with universal harmony and would therefore be the very lowest kind of criminal" (*Modern*, 89). So Shakespeare was on Frye's mind from the beginning, and in the two books on the Bible that came at the end of his career there are more than thirty references to Shakespeare.

What I would like to do is concentrate on Frye's criticism of Shakespeare's comedies and romances because these are the plays to which he has devoted most of his attention, and his criticism of them has had the greatest influence. I will restrict my remarks mainly to the argument of *A Natural Perspective*, published more than a quarter-century ago. Then, after noting briefly the ways that this study fits into Frye's general poetics, I'll glance at the kind of influence his theory of the comedies and romances has had in Anglo-American Shakespearean studies.

Frye's approach in *A Natural Perspective* is, as he says, from "a middle distance," meaning that he prefers to retreat from commentary on the texture of the plays and to see them rather as unified by "recurring images and structural devices" (*Renaissance*, 128). Structure for Frye is, of course, a key critical principle, as is convention, and in the first two chapters he uncovers the conventional nature of the comedies, and notes their structural similarities both to music, with its echoes of repeated patterns and contrapuntal complexities, and to opera, with its lack of connective tissue and its spectacle. Frye distinguishes here, as he does in other places, Shakespearean from Jonsonian comedy. The latter is a theater of illusion, always focused on creating the appearance of reality. Shakespeare's comedies, however, belong to the theater of convention. Shakespeare "does not ask his audience to accept an illusion," says Frye: "he asks them to listen to a story" (*Renaissance*, 136)—

to enter a world which is not an allegory of experience but which is self-contained and exists for its own sake. Jonson's theater is abstract and sophisticated; Shakespeare's is innocent and childlike. Jonson's builds an experience for the spectator. Shakespeare's builds a construct for the participant—an uncritical participant who is asked to willingly suspend his or her disbelief in the face of all the comic conventions: bafflements, disguises, coincidences, improbabilities, mistaken identities, and the like. Comedy, for Frye, has a typical structure and a typical mood, which is festive. It also exhibits what Frye calls “archaizing tendencies,” primitive and popular features that “establish contact with a universal and world-wide dramatic tradition” (*Renaissance*, 164); and its conventions descend from myths, the outlines of which, lying just beneath the surface of the plays, audiences instinctively respond to.

Frye's third chapter, which concentrates on the traditional structure of the comedies, recapitulates some of the arguments from *Anatomy of Criticism*: Renaissance comedy is based on the formula of the New Comedy patterns of Plautus and Terence, which involve the struggle of a younger generation to establish a new social order in the face of opposition from an older generation. There are three phases in the pattern, beginning with the irrational anticomic society and its various blocking characters, moving through a phase of confusion and lost identity, and concluding with the discovery of identity and festive reconciliation. In this last phase the old society gives way, the opposition of the parental blocking characters disappears, characters drop their disguises, and the new society is ushered in with the marriage of the young.

Frye elaborates this drive toward identity in the last chapter, and it is here that we discover the central Frygian claim, that comedy and romance move us to a higher world altogether. There is actually a double movement in comedy, one cyclical and the other dialectical. The cyclical movement is analogous to what we find in nature—a movement from birth to death to rebirth. The first half of the cycle takes us toward the tragedy of death, but comedy completes the cycle as the plot works its way, socially, toward the new community and, individually, toward self-knowledge. Dialectically, Shakespearean comedy is analogous to the Christian myth, in which we fall from Eden, enter the tyranny of human history, and eventually get back to our proper home.

It is sometimes difficult to know the precise distinctions Frye sees in Shakespeare between the comedies and the romantic comedies, and we might think the distinctions disappear altogether when Frye calls one of the romances, *Cymbeline*, “a romantic tragedy based on a folklore plot” (*Renaissance*, 142). Nevertheless, it is clear that by *romances* he means the four late plays, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, and each of the four chapters concludes with a glance at one of these plays. In fact, Frye's main thesis is “that the four romances are the inevitable and genuine culmination of the poet's achievement” (*Renaissance*, 128). His thesis about the romances is what distinguishes *Natural Perspective* from his essay “The Argument of Comedy,” written seventeen years earlier and incorporated into *Anatomy of Criticism*. The theme of life emerging from death, which is implicit in the comedies, gets fully expressed in the romances: the wish-fulfillment dream of the comedies gets itself fully fulfilled, so to speak. Because the structure is a complete narrative structure, the romances are not, therefore, the product of a tired poet with a bored imagination. “We may . . . see in the romances,” Frye says, “the end of the steady growth of Shakespeare's technical interest in the structure of drama. The romances are to Shakespeare what *The Art of the Fugue* and *The Musical Offering* are to Bach: not retreats into pedantry, but the final articulations of craftsmanship” (*Renaissance*, 133).

This bald and abstract summary of Frye's central thesis does little, I realize, to recommend a book that has all of the features of his eloquence and wit. Nor does what I have hastily sketched, being void of all illustrations, do anything to represent the kinds of evidence Frye draws upon from all over the Shakespeare canon to give credence to his claims. My interest has been simply to recreate the general shape of his argument.

II

A Natural Perspective begins with Frye's oft-quoted statement that he has always been temperamentally an Odyssean critic, meaning that his "interest in literature tends to center . . . in the area of comedy and romance" (*Renaissance*, 129). The Iliad critic, on the other hand, is drawn toward tragedy, realism, and irony. The end to which comedy and romance takes us is coincident with Frye's first principles, and it goes a long way toward characterizing the fundamentals of his visionary poetics, which begin with William Blake and ends with the Bible. The comic vision also has a great deal to do with the fundamentally religious base upon which Frye has built the superstructure of thirty books and hundreds of essays. The Biblical myth is a romantic one, moving from creation to apocalypse. And apocalypse for Frye means revelation or recognition. There are recognition scenes in life, as well as in literature, and the greatest recognition for Frye seems often to be those moments of intense illumination, what he calls in his recent writing, the moment of ecstatic metaphor that lifts us clear from the bondage of history. This is why I think Frye's poetics can be called a poetics of vision.

Consider, for example, his summary remarks on *The Winter's Tale*. He says that the meaning of the play "is our total experience of drama. The center of that experience is the fact that drama is doing, through the identity of myth and metaphor, what its ritual predecessors tried to do by the identity of sympathetic magic: unite the human and the natural worlds. But the world where this unity can be achieved is clearly not the world of ordinary experience, in which man is an alienated spectator. The world we are looking at in the conclusion of *The Winter's Tale* "is not an object of belief so much as an imaginative model of desire" (*Renaissance*, 199).

Or consider Frye's summary remarks on the vision at the end of *The Tempest*, perhaps his favorite Shakespearean play: "With the vision of this world," Frye says, "the world of ordinary experience disappears, for the separation has finally been made between reality and illusion, the created and the objective. . . . In the world of the masque time has become the rhythm of existence, the recovery by man of the energy of nature. In the nonexistent world below, time is the universal devourer that has finally nothing to swallow but itself. Prospero's great speech at the end of the masque tells us that everything we perceive disappears in time. That is, the world of the spectator is ultimately abolished. What is presented to us must be possessed by us, as Prospero tells us in the Epilogue. We are told that the characters, as usual, will adjourn to hear more about themselves, but we need not follow them, for it is our own identity that we are interested in now. If anything is to make sense of this play, no less than Peter Quince's play, it must be, as Hippolyta says, our imagination and not theirs. When Prospero's work is done, and there is nothing left to see, the vision of the brave new world becomes the world itself, and the dance of vanishing spirits a revel that has no end" (*Renaissance*, 225).

In both of these conclusions we have what, I think, is fundamental in Frye: his notion that what literature provides are models of possible worlds; his insistence that the two principles out of which literature is made, myth and metaphor, resolve the split between subject and object; that the highest level on which literature operates is what he calls in the *Anatomy* the level of anagogy; that the romantic vision defeats the ravages of time. It has always been interesting to me that more often than not the language of Frye's conclusions—the endings of his books, essays, chapters within the book—imitate the subject he is writing about. The language of the concluding paragraphs is not the language of formalism, of taxonomy, of structure. It is rather the prophetic, discontinuous, oracular language of the prophetic and visionary imagination. And while it is not the religious language of doctrine and belief, it is the language of the religious visionary, much closer to Longinus than to Aristotle.

III

I conclude with a few words about the influence of Frye's Shakespearean criticism. It is a commonplace for those in Blake studies to remark that *Fearful Symmetry* revolutionized our understanding of the prophetic books. While we cannot make quite the same claim for the impact of *A Natural Perspective* on our understanding of Shakespeare's comedies and romances, Frye's influence has unquestionably been substantial. The more than thirty-reviews of the book in the mid-1960s certainly give little hint that the book would come to achieve the status it has. The reviews, in fact, contain a catalogue of some of the main complaints against Frye: that his categorizing blurs distinctions (Siegel, 331), that his "arguments tend to lose their hold on the 'concrete' reality of the plays" (Hawkes, 563), that he sacrifices the reality principle to a myth (Kermode, "Deep," 11-12), that his application of the cyclical theory is a mechanical routine that leads to a "sense of monotony and critical busy-work" (Brower, 136), that his "relentless classifying wearies" and does not "allow for nuances within individual works" of Shakespeare (Barish), that the book's "arguments are most tendentious" and contain "much misreading and stretching to prove a point" (Arnold, 431), that the book contains "errors of fact" (Prouty), that Frye's position is irrelevant because it disregards the question of value (Cogswell), and so on. We even have C.L. Barber, the Shakespearean Frye is most frequently linked with, saying that Frye "is not very successful in his mode" and asking the rhetorical question, "Where does one go on to from a 'total vision?'" (70). The reviews are by no means altogether negative: a number of them heap praise on Frye. Still, as a whole they give little suggestion that *A Natural Perspective* would come to occupy the place it has in Shakespearean studies.

The dust-jacket writer for *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare* claims that Frye is the "dean of Shakespearean criticism." A number of Shakespeareans will no doubt be surprised by such a claim. Frye is certainly not a Shakespearean scholar in any traditional sense of the term, and he in fact says that his lectures "are not contributions to Shakespearean scholarship as such" (*Renaissance*, 128). What kind of contributions are they then? What kind of space does Frye occupy in Shakespearean studies? To answer these questions I will have to rely on several surveys of Shakespearean criticism. Two of them are especially forthright in their claim that Frye's work is seminal. First, Robert Merrill sees the development of the generic approach to Shakespearean comedy as beginning with *Anatomy of Criticism* and *A Natural Perspective*, books that chart an entirely new direction. He notes that what the works of eight major Shakespeareans have in common is that they all respond to, clarify, or expand some aspect of Frye's ideas about comic form. Similarly, in a long review-article, Wayne Rebhorn sets out to determine the impact of Frye's work on the interpretation of the comedies and romances since the early 1960s. After examining the work of dozens of Shakespeareans, he concludes that Frye's criticism of the comedies provides the starting point for almost all subsequent commentary. Later work depends directly on Frye, or else it complements, qualifies, or deepens his theories.

Others have come to similar conclusions. In an essay on the comedies in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, Lawrence Danson says that Frye's work has "provided the single most important impetus" in the "rediscovery" of the genre of comedy. And R.S. White, in another survey of the criticism of the comedies, says that without Frye "the study of Shakespearean comedy could have remained . . . in the domain of charming, weightless *belles-lettres*." I remember some years ago, when I was a junior instructor, I mentioned Frye's work on Shakespeare to my department chair, who was a Shakespearean. His reaction was dismissive: he said in effect that nobody who was serious about Shakespeare would take Frye very seriously. And there is a similar attitude running through the reviews of his books. But I gather from what I now read in the secondary literature of the comedies and romances, at least, that it is no longer possible to see Frye as someone on the

fringe talking only to himself.

In *Fools of Time* Frye says this by way of introducing the notion of tragedy: “Death is what defines the individual, and marks him off from the continuity of life that flows indefinitely between the past and the future. It gives to the individual life a parabola shape, rising from birth to maturity and sinking again, and this parabola movement of rise and fall is also the typical shape of tragedy. The mood of tragedy preserves our ambiguous and paradoxical feeling about death that it is inevitable and always happens, and yet, when it does happen, it carries with it some sense of the unnatural and premature” (*Renaissance*, 251–2). Frye had an extraordinarily long writing career (his first published work goes all the way back to 1931), but we do feel, I think, partly because he was such a monument in contemporary culture, that there was something altogether unnatural about his death. And the fact that during the last decade of his life he was still producing books and essays that gave no sign of a diminution of critical energy makes us also feel that his death was indeed premature.

Appendix: Northrop Frye’s Shakespearean Criticism

Frye’s criticism of Shakespeare is, of course, liberally spread throughout the large body of his writings, from *Anatomy of Criticism* to *Words with Power*. What follows is a selective list of his Shakespearean criticism. For the explicitly Shakespearean essays I have provided annotations.

Books

A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance. New York: Columbia UP, 1965. Paperback reprint: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969. German translation: *Shakespeares Vollendung: Eine Einführung in die Welt seiner Komödien*. Trans. Helmut Haug. Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1966. Japanese translation: *Shakespia kikeki to romance no hatten*. Trans. Kōsai Ishihara and Hitoshi Ichikawa. Tokyo: Sansyusya, 1987.

Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967. Paperback reprint: Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973. Italian translation: *Tempo che opprime, tempo che redime: Riflessioni sul teatro di Shakespeare*. Part 1 (13–113) is a translation by Valentina Poggi of *Fools of Time*.

The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1983. British edition: Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983. Italian translation: *Tempo che opprime, tempo che redime: Riflessioni sul teatro di Shakespeare*. Part 2 (115–197) is a translation by Maria Pia De Angelis of *The Myth of Deliverance*.

Northrop Frye on Shakespeare. Ed. Robert Sandier. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1986. Hardcover and paperback editions. U. S. edition: New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Paperback and casebound editions. French translation: *Shakespeare et son théâtre*. Trans. Charlotte Melancon. Paris: Bordal-Express, 1988. Italian translation: *Shakespeare: Nove lezioni*. Trans. Andrea Carosso. Turin: Einaudi, 1990.

Monographs and Essays

“The Argument of Comedy.” *English Institute Essays*: 1948. Ed. D.A. Robertson, Jr. New York: Columbia UP, 1949. Incorporated into Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, Third Essay, and reprinted in a number of books. In this well-known essay Frye traces the structure of comedy from Aristophanes

through the New Comedy of Menander, Plautus, Terence, and the New-Comedy conventions of Jonson and Molière to the Elizabethan comedy of Shakespeare. Frye maintains that the structure of comedy derives from Greek New Comedy, as transmitted by Plautus and Terence, in which the main theme is that of a young man falling in love with a young woman and eventually, after overcoming various blocking characters, being able to possess the object of his desire. There are two centers of interest in this kind of comedy, according to Frye: the individual (the opponents have to surrender in the end to the hero) and social (the resolution that points toward the establishment of a new social order). Frye argues that tragedy is actually an implicit or incomplete comedy, since it is resolved by the resurrection that follows death. Shakespeare's comedy, however, "begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world," the expression "green world" indicating the analogies Shakespeare's comedies have to ritual, like the rebirth of spring after winter, as well as to the idealized world of dreamlike desire. Shakespeare's distinctive comic resolution, finally, "is the detachment of the spirit" that is born from the follies of the normal world and from the pastoral lovers, dreams, and fairies of the dream world.

"Comic Myth in Shakespeare." *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*. Series 3. 46, section 2 (June 1952); 47–58. Frye distinguishes Jonsonian from Shakespearean comedy. Jonson's descends from Greek New Comedy, the form of which shows up in all popular comedy down to our own time. The action in this form of comedy consists in the obstacles thrown up before a young man who is seeking a young woman; overcoming these obstacles, usually parental, constitutes the comic resolution. Jonson's comedy emphasizes the blocking characters, those who seek to thwart the hero's triumph. The interest in Shakespeare's comedy, however, is on the resolution of final discovery. Rather than Jonsonian humors, Shakespeare presents us with a world of absurd law to be overcome, which finally occurs when we are shown a vision of what life should be like. When it reaches the form of dramatic romance, it "is far more primitive and popular" than Jonsonian and "is of a type found all over the world," similar in its conventions to those of Lope de Vega, *commedia dell'arte*, Italian opera, Chinese comedies, and Japanese kabuki plays.

"Characterization in Shakespearean Comedy." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 (July 1953): 271–7. Incorporated into *Anatomy of Criticism*, Third Essay. Frye begins by distinguishing four types of characters in Shakespeare's comedies: (1) the *alazon*, or the humorous blocking character, who is an impostor (in the sense that *alazons* are hypocrites or lack self-knowledge); (2) the *iron*, or self-deprecating character, such as the tricky slave, scheming valet, and mischievous trickster; (3) the *bomolochus*, or buffoon, whose function is to increase the mood of festivity; and (4) the *agroikos*, one who functions in opposition to the festive buffoon, such as the miserly and snobbish malcontent. Frye argues that characterization in Shakespearean comedy depends on function and that the fact that characters are stock types does not mean they are not lifelike.

"Introduction." *Shakespeare's "The Tempest."* Baltimore: Penguin, 1959. 15–26. Rev. ed., 1970. Frye analyzes the characters of the play and the vision of a new social order that is achieved at the end of the action. He also examines the nature of Prospero's magic, the theme of time, the play's connections of previous literature and with contemporary accounts of shipwrecks, its genre (a spectacular and operatic play), and its connections with Shakespeare's other romances.

"How True a Twain." *The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Edward Huber. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Basic Books, 1962. 25–53. Reprinted in Frye's *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Methodology*, 88–106. Frye argues against the biographical approach in studying Shakespeare's

sonnets. Rather than assuming that Shakespeare's life provides the key, we should "start with the assumption that the sonnets are poetry, therefore written within a specific literary tradition and a specific literary genre." Frye examines Shakespeare's use of the generic conventions of courtly love poetry and shows that the sonnets embody the entire range of love relationships, from the "high" Platonic forms through the Petrarchan norm to the "low" forms that parody the Petrarchan conventions. He maintains that there are three cycles lying behind the arrangement of the sonnets, and he analyzes the imagery Shakespeare uses throughout the poems.

"Proposal of Toast." *Stratford Papers on Shakespeare*. Ed. B.W. Jackson. Toronto: Gage, 1962. 194–5. Frye speaks of the three aspects of Shakespeare's personality: the man himself, the playwright, and the person whose social vision and insight into humanity have helped us to formulate our own thoughts, vision, and speech.

"Recognition in *The Winter's Tale*." *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama: In Honor of Hardin Craig*. Ed. Richard Hosley. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1962. 235–6. Reprinted in Frye's *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, 107–18. Frye calls attention to the double recognition scene in the play: the first is only reported and derives from the conventional *cognito* of New Comedy; the second is the statue scene in which Hermione is awakened. Shakespeare is more interested in the second. Frye observes that the controlling power of the action is identified both with the will of Apollo and with the power of nature, and that art is "part of the regenerating power of the play." He examines the three kinds of art mentioned in the play and concludes that at the end "nature provides the means for the regeneration of artifice," all of which is worked out within the dialectical framework of Renaissance cosmology and the conventional framework of the cycle of nature.

"Shakespeare's Experimental Comedy." *Stratford Papers on Shakespeare*. Ed. B. W. Jackson. Toronto: Gage, 1962. 2–14. An analysis of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Frye sees the play as coming from the tradition of Greek New Comedy; the *commedia dell'arte*; the comedy of wit and dialogue in Peele, Greene, and Lyly; and the Renaissance masque. He observes that the play differs from Shakespeare's other comedies in that it does not have the normal comic ending—the festivity that symbolizes the birth of a new society. He also examines the play as a comedy of humors, with the stock characters forming "a kind of chorus to the main action." The humor that the king's court has to be released from is an excess of wit. Unlike the happy green world endings of Shakespeare's other comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost* has no suggestion that spring is to triumph over winter.

"The Tragedies of Nature and Fortune." *Stratford Papers on Shakespeare*. Ed. B. W. Jackson. Toronto: Gage, 1962. 38–55. An analysis of Shakespeare's Roman plays, chiefly *Coriolanus*. Frye concentrates on explaining the division of moral sympathies in the play, concluding that Shakespeare intended to make "the dramatic conflict as sharp as evenly divided as possible." He shows how the tragedy of *Coriolanus* is a mixture of the heroic and the ironic and how, because he "is a man without a mask, or fully developed social personality . . . there is nothing to mediate between his thought and his expression." Still, the play illustrates the power of rhetoric in forming the destiny of human beings, even though *Coriolanus's* impatient sincerity ends in disaster.

"Shakespeare and the Modern World." Presented as a CBC Radio talk on May 13, 1964. Published in Frye's *Reading the World: Selected Writings, 1935-76*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. New York: Peter Lang, 1990. 167–77. Frye celebrates Shakespeare's freeing and liberalizing power in modern civilization, a power that stems largely from a "detachment that is totally involved." He also comments on Shakespeare's emancipating style, the discipline of his selective mind, his renouncing

of personality, and his identity with his audience.

“Nature and Nothing.” *Essays on Shakespeare*. Ed. G.W. Chapman. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965. 35–58. An interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays based on their movement between two poles of dialectic: nature and nothing. Nature exists on two levels, the upper level of human nature, which is the world of innocence and art, and the lower level of physical nature. “Nothing” represents the order of annihilation and nonbeing, which exists below physical nature. Frye analyzes more than a dozen of Shakespeare’s plays from the perspective of these levels of being, concentrating on the kinds of action and imagery found on each level.

“The Structure and Spirit of Comedy.” *Stratford Papers on Shakespeare*, 1964. Ed. B. W. Jackson. Toronto: Gage, 1965. 1–9. Frye distinguishes between the two forms of literary experience that are based on the limitations of human life, with its natural and social contracts (tragedy and irony) and the two forms that are based on freeing life from these contracts (comedy and romance). He then analyzes the simple form of comic structure, exemplified in the works of Beaumarchais, and the more complex form, exemplified by Shakespeare and Molière, where there is a complicated interchange between reality and illusion.

“General Editor’s Introduction.” *Shakespeare Series*. 2 vols. Toronto: Macmillan; New York: Odyssey P, 1968. vii-xii. Frye cautions against using the biographical approach to Shakespeare’s plays, and discusses briefly the main scholarly issues in the study of Shakespeare: dating the plays, sources used, staging the plays in Shakespeare’s theater, and establishing the texts.

“Romance as Masque.” First published in Frye’s *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*, 148–78, and reprinted in a slightly different form in *Shakespeare’s Romances Reconsidered*. Ed. Carol Ginnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1978. 11–39. Part 3 of this essay examines the affinities of Shakespeare’s comedies and romances with the masque, antimasque, Old Comedy, and New Comedy.

“Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.” Originally presented as a lecture in Vicenza, Italy, May 18, 1979. First published in the *Northrop Frye Newsletter* 2 (Summer 1990): 19–27, and reprinted in *The Eternal Act of Creation, Essays by Northrop Frye, 1979-1990*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. Frye distinguishes between Jonsonian and Shakespearean comedy, maintaining that the latter requires a childlike response to the familiar and conventional characteristics of the pre-Jonsonian kind of comedy. As Shakespeare gets closer to pre-Jonsonian comedy in his last years, his plays become romances, “the bedrock of drama, the musical, poetic, and spectacular panorama of magic and fantasy in which there is no longer tragedy or comedy, but an action passing through tragic and comic modes to a conclusion of serenity and peace.” Frye illustrates the comprehensive romantic structure of *The Winter’s Tale* and *Measure for Measure*, both of which have a diptych form of action. He examines *The Tempest* in terms of the conventions of dramatic romance, calling attention to the complex relations between illusion and reality that result. He also discusses the analogues between *The Tempest* and initiation rites, as well as its similarities to Japanese Noh plays; and he sees the chief recognition in the play as having to do with the triumph of art.

“Something Rich and Strange: Shakespeare’s Approach to Romance.” [Stratford, Ontario: Stratford Shakespeare Festival], 1982. 16pp. Frye examines the dramatic structure and typical characters in four plays written near the end of Shakespeare’s career: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*. He looks especially at *The Tempest*, concentrating on its action: “the reversing of the usual

conceptions of reality and illusion.”

“The Stage Is All the World.” Originally presented as a lecture at Stratford, Ontario, in July 1985. Published in Frye’s *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974-88*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990. 196–211. Frye examines a number of Shakespeare’s uses of the “stage” metaphor in order to illustrate the way the dramatist conceives of personality or the various roles one plays. He suggests that in both life and drama the stage is a world because it is “a place where illusion is reality.” Frye looks especially at *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.