
Northrop Frye Newsletter

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Requiescat in Pace

Most readers of the *Newsletter* will, by this time, be aware that Northrop Frye died of cardiac arrest on January 23 in Toronto. Kingsley Joblin officiated at the family funeral in the Victoria College Chapel on January 26, and memorial services were held for the Victoria University community, also in the Victoria Chapel, on January 28 and for the larger University of Toronto community in Convocation Hall on January 29.

A quarter century ago Northrop Frye, delivering the baccalaureate sermon to the graduating classes of Victoria and Emmanuel Colleges, preached from the text "Take therefore no thought for the morrow." He urged the graduates to forgo "the expectation of identifying [their] lives with a definite body of work achieved." The life that manifests the practical wisdom of a social vision, he said, is to be preferred to a body of accomplishments. Such a vision, he continued, may occasionally give us a glimpse of a greater wisdom, "a sense of a presence which is ourselves yet infinitely bigger than ourselves, which lives with us but which will not disappear into death when we do."

It is difficult to imagine a body of accomplishments larger than Frye's. His preeminence as a literary theorist, his achievements as a teacher, his labors on behalf of Canadian culture, his devoted work as a public servant, and of course the massive body of writing that has instructed and delighted us for almost six decades—these achievements have been well documented. They bear witness to an accomplishment that even a disinterested observer would have to call monumental. The written responses to his work—the books and essays and reviews occasioned by his own eloquent prose—require a fairly thick volume just to record, and they have originated on every continent of the globe save Antarctica. No Anglo-American critic can claim as great an international reputation as Frye can.

Frye certainly had honors heaped upon him aplenty, but he would naturally draw back from any suggestion that we canonize him for accomplishments. In the words of the obituary from the *London Times*, "Frye was one of the last great critics to be concerned with humane letters rather than with his own position in the hierarchy." That is precisely the point of his urging the Victorian and Emmanuel graduates not to identify their lives with a body of achievements. He says, rather, that it's the practical wisdom of a

social vision that we should commit ourselves to, for only then can we begin to envision, as he put it in the baccalaureate sermon, “a presence which is ourselves yet infinitely bigger than ourselves.”

Frye often wrote about the end of things: apocalypse was a central category for him in both literature and life. In a 1970 sermon delivered in the Merton College Chapel, he spoke of mortality in these terms: “Death, the gospel tells us, is the last of our new beginnings: it is not the opposite of life, but only the opposite of birth, until we reach it, when it becomes birth, and in our last and greatest act of renunciation we find that all things have been made anew.” The sense of an ending, says Frank Kermode in a book of that title, reflects our “irreducibly intermediary preoccupations.” Frye’s sense of an ending is clearly related to his central intermediary preoccupation, the expanding vision that makes up his life’s work. It has been too little remarked, I think, the degree to which this vision is fundamentally religious. The dissenting, visionary, Low Church Protestantism that was Norrie’s heritage helps to explain a number of his first principles. “My religious background really *did* shape almost everything,” he reported to David Cayley about a year ago. And just as Norrie’s sense of a beginning was rooted in a religious vision, so was his sense of an ending.

In *The Secular Scripture* he remarks that “not all of us will be satisfied with calling the central part of our mythological inheritance a revelation from God, and, though each chapter of this book closes on much the same cadence, I cannot claim to have found a more acceptable formulation.” The context of this perception is still another of Norrie’s many efforts to name the imagination’s sense of otherness, but what is perhaps most revealing is the dependent clause tucked away in the middle. To speak of the cadence of closure calls our attention to the intimate relation between the rhythm of Norrie’s ideas and his sense of an ending. The conclusions to Norrie’s books, to chapters within his books, and to his essays seem more often than not to return to his own sense of what is fundamental—what he refers to as “the third order of experience.” This, of course, is imaginative experience, but it is also the experience of a religious vision.

It seems foolish to try to put into other words Frye’s sense of an ending. Let me simply recall a few of his own eloquent conclusions, a sampler of endings from each of the seven decades of his writing career—endings that return us to Frye’s beginnings and that reflect the ultimate end of his intermediary preoccupations. The first was written when he was twenty-three; the last, several months before his death.

You remember that it started to rain when Snow White dropped dead, and that she remained in her glass coffin through autumn and winter, and came back to life in the spring when her lover kissed her? Well, that’s what most of those primitive rituals were about—the spirit of life and growth that died when the year died and rose again at the year’s rebirth. The rituals meant more than just rape and murder. Primitive people were cursed with that, and we are born under that curse, but we and our children don’t have to keep applauding gangsters and allowing them to tear us to pieces with bombshells to the end of time. If winter comes, can spring be far behind? —“Music and the Savage Breast” (1938)

Just as in time of prosperity and confidence men turn to science to speed up their own progress, so in times of trouble and confusion, when even the unreligious begin to understand something of what is meant by the fall of man, the humanities come into focus again. For they lead us away from that ordinary and unthinking life that promised us comfort and gave us misery, and toward the discipline of spiritual freedom from which they derive the name of liberal. —“Education and the Humanities” (1947)

All construction has to come from the spiritual power great enough to bring peace on earth to men of good will. And it is impossible to exaggerate the physical weakness of that power: a new-born baby in a deserted stable in a forlorn village of a miserable province of an enslaved empire is not more weak. The important thing is that it should be a real presence, and when it is, all the wise and simple begin to meet one another around its cradle. —“Trends in Modern Culture” (1952)

In the last plate [of Blake’s Job illustrations], things are much as they were before, but Job’s family have taken the instruments down from the tree and are playing them. In Blake, we recover our original state, not by returning to it, but by

re-creating it. The act of creation, in its turn, is not producing something out of nothing, but the act of setting free what we already possess. —“The Keys to the Gates” (1966)

It is not difficult to see the destroying angel of the Book of Wisdom’s vision, what with war in the Near East, war in the Middle East, war in the Far East. . . . There is nothing new in foreboding of disaster; they have been essentially the picture the world has presented for the last four or five thousand years, long before the time of Christ. But there is still a difference between seeing only that and seeing in it the eclipsing shadow of a power that is still fighting for us. It is the latter vision that turns the darkness of Advent into the festival of blazing lights, the lights which are the glory of a God who is also Man, who is continually born and continually dying, and yet remains unborn and beyond the reach of death. —“A Leap in the Dark” (1971)

If the human race were to destroy both itself and the planet it lives on, that would be the final triumph of illusion. But we have other myths, myths telling us that time and space and life have an end, but that the sense of identity with something other than these things will not, that there is a word which, whether flesh or not, is still dwelling with us. Also that our ability to respond to what it says is the only sensible reason yet proposed for our being here. —“The Expanding World of Metaphor” (1984)

There is nothing so unique about death as such, where we may be too distracted by illness or sunk in senility to have much identity at all. In the double vision of a spiritual and a physical world simultaneously present, every moment we have lived through we have also died out of into another order. Our life in the resurrection, then, is already here, and waiting to be recognized. —The Double Vision (1990)

Requiescat in Pace.

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Frye’s death naturally occasioned an outpouring of testimonials and remembrances from all over the world. Those that have come to my attention are listed at the end of the “Bibliography” in this issue. What follows are selected sentences from a few of the tributes:

Just before he died—the night before in fact—Canada’s Parliament decided that we cannot afford to remain the “detached, observant” country Frye had wished for. Maybe we can’t. But who can say how that report must have hurt this gentle, wise Canadian, this great peaceful man of letters whom we will all miss more than we know. —Graham Forst

Northrop Frye believed strongly that literature may educate readers by challenging their unexamined assumptions, accepted ideas, stock responses, and prejudices, and thereby free them from the tyranny of the present. He will be remembered by those who accept that challenge. —A. C. Hamilton

Frye was one of the editors of the first comprehensive and systematic history of Canadian literature, and I can assure you that his editorship was not a deferential sinecure. The three volumes bear the mark of his constant editorial concern, and, in the two summarizing essays he wrote, the mark of his royal style and explosive ideas. He will continue, through his books and in our memories, to please, to startle, and to enlighten. — Claude T. Bissell

It was a shock to hear that the man I thought of as the first citizen of Toronto was suddenly dead. It was like the abrupt disappearance of a mountain range that had been there forever. But how lovely it was to live in Frye’s Toronto, how fortunate we were to live in the Age of the Rev. Mr. Frye. — Robert Fulford

Teaching is not something Northrop Frye engaged in as an unimportant and tedious academic duty. Despite his reputation as the foremost literary critic of his own and many another generation, he always spoke of himself as an educator. He did not lock literature into an ivory tower; instead he emphasized its centrality to the development of a civilized and humane society.

As a critic he did not write for other critics; he wrote instead for the intelligent general reader. His early experiences as a divinity student and preacher stood him in good stead: pick up any of his books and what you will hear (not see, for he was enormously conscious of the oral and even musical values of the word) is a personal voice, speaking to you directly. Because of its style, flexibility, and formal elegance, its broad range and systematic structure, his literary criticism takes its place easily within the body of literature itself. . . . There are many people, including some who never knew him personally, who will feel orphaned by his death. —Margaret Atwood

Those who love literature will continue to regard Frye as one of the wisest friends literature ever had. —H. Keith Monroe

Lucky, bloody lucky, to live in the same time as the giant figures. The world is emptying. —Timothy Findley

Like Socrates, Dr. Frye died teaching, and like Socrates it was the youth of Athens, the undergraduate community, that was his chief concern. —Ward McBurney

Frye's personal presence affected all who met him because above all he was a teacher who loved the word, who loved to teach, who loved to joke and to listen, to learn and to impart what he learned. —Bob Rae

For those of us who have been repelled in recent days by the pious prayers of Saddam Hussein and George Bush each invoking the assistance of heaven on behalf of his half-million troops, it is perhaps healthy to remember Frye's view that when most people think they are being religious they are really worshipping the devil. —Alvin Lee

Frye really did believe that literature, the clearest expression of human dreams and symbols, could save society from destruction. In that respect, he remained an evangelist throughout his life, arguing carefully and convincingly, and with restrained fervor, that we must never cease to educate and refine our imaginations. —Philip Marchand

Northrop Frye was living proof that as W. B. Yeats said: "Words alone are certain good." Most people, in view of what our talkative media and belligerent advertising do with words, take Yeats' statement with a large grain of salt, but in Frye's case, that of a master of focused, sinewy, compelling, and clairvoyant prose, the truth of the great Irish poet's claim was proven over and over again. —James Reaney

Though he anticipated most of the central concerns of the structuralists and post-structuralists now fashionable, Frye wrote in a language that could be immediately understood. He was one of the last leading critics to be concerned with humane letters rather than with his own position in a hierarchy. —Obituary, London Times

To Toronto critic and writer Robert Fulford, Frye was simply "our greatest literary figure." Clearly, the world agreed. —John Bemrose

Frye gave us a realistic basis, not a dour one, on which to put a vision of what we might be as a community and as communities, consorting with others. —Douglas Fisher

He was one of us —Pauline McGibbon

A note for those wishing to make memorial contributions: contributions for both Canadian and U.S. citizens are tax deductible. Canadian citizens should make checks payable to The Northrop Frye Centre. In order to get proper tax deductible receipts, U. S. citizens should make checks payable to Associates of the University of Toronto, Incorporated. Contributions from Canada, the U. S., and all other countries should be sent to Dr. Eva Kushner, c/o The Northrop Frye Centre, Victoria University, 73 Queen's Park Crescent, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1K7.

Frye Conference

The Northrop Frye Centre is planning a Fall 1992 conference, to be held at the University of Toronto, on Frye's legacy. The next issue of the *Newsletter* will carry details.

Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies

The Winter 1990-91 issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* was devoted to Frye. Entitled *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*, this special issue was edited by Howard D. Weinbrot. It contains Frye's address, "Varieties of Eighteenth Century Sensibility," delivered at the 1990 Minnesota Conference of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies; an "Introduction" by Howard Weinbrot; Weinbrot's own paper, "Northrop Frye and the Literature of Process Reconsidered," presented at the 1989 conference of the ASECS; two additional papers presented at the 1990 conference, Eric Rothstein's "Anatomy and Bionomics of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Cases" and Paul Hunter's "Novels and History and Northrop Frye"; and Frye's "Response" to the special session.

Copies of this special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* are available for \$13 from Edward P. Harris, ASECS, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221-3820.

The Ideas of Northrop Frye

We continue here with part two of the three-part CBC Radio program, *The Ideas of Northrop Frye*, which was written and presented by David Cayley, produced by Sarah Wolch, and aired February 19 and 26 and March 5, 1990, on CBC Radio. The recording engineer was Brian Hill. Thanks again to David Cayley for his permission to reproduce a transcript of the program. The third part of the series will be published in the next issue of the *Newsletter*.

Michael Dolzani Frye once made the joke that there are critics who could find things of value in the public records office, and then there were critics like himself who couldn't find the public records office. He is a critic who takes familiar subject matter and crystallizes it for people, shows that it has a pattern that people hadn't realized before. He's not the kind of critic who comes up with new subject matter by doing various types of research.

Lister Sinclair In more than twenty books, Northrop Frye has produced one of the most influential bodies of literary criticism in the twentieth century. But he's also spent his career as a dedicated teacher of the young, and his teaching and scholarship have fed each other.

Johan Aitken He's said that a teacher who is not a scholar is soon going to be out of touch with his own subject, and a scholar who is not a teacher is soon going to be out of touch with the world.

Lister Sinclair As a teacher and a scholar, Frye has what he calls an evangelical attitude, a belief that only the cultural power of religion and the arts can set the human spirit free.

NF Culture is the ultimate authority in society, even though culture may be impotent to impose its authority and, in effect, it would be false to itself if it did. Mao Tse-tung says that power comes out of the barrel of a gun. Now, if that is your conception of power, the human race is not going to survive the twenty-first century.

DC Culture is an alternative conception of power?

NF It's utterly weak physically, but it's the only power there is, the only surviving power there is.

Lister Sinclair At the University of Toronto, where he has taught for more than fifty years, Northrop Frye embodies the authority of culture. As a teacher, he has kept alive a vision of the university as a community which really is turned towards the unity of knowledge, as the Latin roots of our word *university* imply. Bristling at the cliché that calls the university an ivory tower, Frye has always insisted that it's just the opposite: the engine room of society, the place that preserves from the ages all that is permanent and valuable in human life. Tonight, in the second part of our intellectual biography of Northrop Frye, we reflect on Frye the teacher, theorist of education and citizen of Canada.

DC In 1929, as a boy of 17 from Moncton, New Brunswick, Northrop Frye enrolled at the University of Toronto's Victoria College. He found there a community so congenial that he never really left. Except for a stint at Oxford in the late thirties and the occasional sabbatical year, Frye has remained associated with Victoria College as a student, teacher, principal, chancellor, and ambassador to the world. Back in the twenties, when Frye first arrived at Vic, the department of English was dominated by E. J. Pratt, whom Frye once called English Canada's most important poet, and Pelham Edgar. Pauline McGibbon, later Ontario's Lieutenant-Governor, was one of Frye's classmates.

Pauline McGibbon We both took Shakespeare from Pelham Edgar in our second year, and I remember that vividly because I can still see Pelham Edgar sitting up on the platform with a gown and his legs wrapped around the little table that he used as a desk, and the whole time was spent really as a dialogue between Pelham Edgar and Northrop Frye. The story was that Norrie had read everything in Shakespeare before he ever came to the university, and so he was the only one who could really talk back and forth and question Pelham Edgar, while the rest of us sat there like nincompoops, and just listened to the two of them.

DC English teaching at Vic was conducted on somewhat different principles than elsewhere at the University of Toronto. At neighboring University College, for example, where a rather stodgy scholarship prevailed, literature was subsumed within the history of ideas. At Vic, Edgar and Pratt were interested in literature itself and in trying to bring it alive for their students. Frye has continued in their footsteps. Though never depreciating specialized scholarship, he has always preferred for himself the path of broad encyclopedic learning, and he has always remained a teacher of undergraduates.

NF The teaching of undergraduates seems to me to be where the action is. That's where minds are being opened and admitted to what I've always called the engine room of society, where all the work is going on. I feel that the graduate school is a place where the good people ought to be teaching themselves anyway. It's also very highly pluralistic, specialized, and competitive in these days. So I find the undergraduate classroom really the educational center.

DC Education is at the heart of Northrop Frye's social philosophy. For him, it's education that frees the intellect and the imagination from their bondage to unexamined ideologies or beliefs. Political philosophers have invoked a social contract to account for our submission to a political state. Frye has invented a corresponding myth to explain how people come to accept the noncompulsory authority of culture. He calls it the educational contract.

NF In the educational contract, there is a relationship of teacher and student in which it is paradoxically the student who knows less than the teacher, but the teacher who asks most of the questions. The process going on is the Socratic process in which the relation of teacher to student, as such, is a somewhat embarrassing one. You try to get over it as fast as possible in order to make a community of searchers, and that's how the contract takes shape.

DC The first stage of this process, as Frye has said, is the Socratic one, in which received ideas are unsettled and stock responses challenged. The next stage is to bring students into the presence of what Frye calls that "mythical and metaphorical organism" which is literature. For years, Frye taught a course at Victoria College on the Puritan poet John Milton. But "taught," as Frye's former student Margaret Atwood has written, "isn't exactly the word." "Frye," recalled Atwood, "said 'let there be Milton,' and lo, there was."

NF If I'm lecturing on Milton, for example, the only presence that has any business being in that room is Milton, and if I become an opaque presence myself and people listen to me instead of listening to Milton

through me, then I'm becoming some sort of fake priest. The only authority in the classroom is the authority of the subject taught, not the teacher. And when I teach, I try to transmute myself into a kind of transparent medium, so that the room, in theory, is full of the presence of what I'm teaching, Milton or whatever, from one end, behind me, to the other end, behind the students. It's a long, slow process for the students to realize that they are in effect within the personality of Milton and they're not being talked to by me.

DC What do you hope will happen in the room?

NF Well, people have talked a good deal about the long pauses in my lectures, and the thing they don't notice is that the long pauses come partly out of respect for the students. I'm listening to the echo of Milton from my students, and it takes a long time for that to penetrate, percolate through my students.

DC Sometimes, for students who weren't too comfortable inside the personality of Milton, this way of teaching could be unsettling.

NF I remember once when a number of Catholic students from St. Michael's came over to listen to my Milton lectures, because for some reason or other nobody was teaching Milton at St. Michael's then. One girl stamped out of the classroom in a fury, saying that she was a Catholic and she wasn't going to have her church insulted in that way. I took that as something of a compliment because it meant that she was confusing Milton with me. And when my Blake book came out, a lot of reviewers complained that they couldn't tell where Blake stopped and where I began. Well, that was the way I wanted it. Incidentally, Marshall McLuhan wrote a quite appreciative review of the Blake book in which he said this was a new type of criticism that people were going to have to get used to—the transmission of a poet through the entire personality of the writer.

DC Frye's capacity to get inside his subject, his devotion to his students, his wit, and his wide learning all helped to make his classes a legend at the University of Toronto. One graduate from the forties told me she was turned away from one of Frye's courses because the Vic students wanted to keep Frye to themselves. And the mystique increased, according to Frye's biographer John Ayre, with the publication of *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye's path-breaking study of the poetry of William Blake.

John Ayre Once *Fearful Symmetry* came out, then he really did become a star. And coincidentally around that time, Frye officially started his Bible course. This used to attract great mobs from all across the campus so that people were sitting down in the aisles and on radiator covers. And it was a very controversial course, too, because the campus fundamentalists thought that he was emphasizing too much a mythological approach to the Bible. But there was a group called the Fryedolaters at Victoria College who used to sit about and read *Fearful Symmetry* like the Bible, and they called Frye "God." "What did God say today?" Frye knew about that, because I noticed a little reference in his diary—"I don't know where this God business comes from"—and he thanked some old friends in his diary for not treating him as if he's just about ready to take off for the heavens.

DC This phrase of intense, and to Frye somewhat embarrassing, adulation eventually passed. But Frye always remained a teacher who made a difference to his students. Johan Aitken is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto. She was a student at Vic in the midfifties.

Johan Aitken Frye was an inspiration to us as a teacher. Sometimes when there'd be dead silence after a question he asked, we'd all feel like nincompoops, and I think he felt we were, but when we did answer, our answers were always treated with the utmost respect. And when Frye, many years later, came to visit my classes in the MAT program and also when I was teaching a course called "Unlocking The Great Code" for the School of Continuing Studies, Frye continued to treat every honest response, however inane, with respect, and somehow wrested from it some meaning, some sense that affirmed the student and took the group on to another question, another viewpoint, another way of thinking. He was a genius in the now much maligned question-and-answer technique of teaching. He knew us, he knew us by name, and of course Norrie and Helen always made the students at Vic feel like family and always, in a very real sense, embraced us.

DC Frye extended to his students the freedom he'd always taken for himself, the freedom to think independently and to trust his own experience. He never let pedantry or scholarly punctilio encumber his

own genius, and he wanted his students to hear the living voice of literature rather than engage in a kind of parody of scholarship.

Johan Aitken Frye told us and we dared to believe him, or at least I did, that if we wanted to know more about Dickens, we should read another book by Dickens, not books about Dickens, that we couldn't read enough anyway to help us very much and all we'd do would be to get stuck with someone else's assumptions and someone else's interpretations. So I wrote an essay once for Norrie about *Paradise Lost* and *Prometheus Unbound*, and in the bibliography I simply listed Milton and Shelley. And then I'd written, "and that's all." Norrie wrote underneath, "and that's fine." So I was allowed to use my own voice—not just allowed to, actually we were encouraged to use our own voices, we were encouraged to do what people would now call "engage the text." We were simply encouraged to read it and read it with depth, and read it again and again, and read other things by the same author, and then to trust ourselves and to have at it and write.

DC Frye encouraged freedom and self-discipline in his students, but he also insisted in discipline. Freedom, he had always said, is not simply a matter of doing what you want. Freedom is wanting to do what you have to do, and this kind of freedom is always rooted in practiced habit.

NF There is no antithesis between freedom and necessity. If you're playing the piano and exercising your free will about whether you'll play the right notes or the wrong notes you're not playing worth a damn. You only know what you're doing when what you want to do and what you have to do are exactly the same thing.

DC Frye's insistence that true freedom only roots in a ground first cultivated by patient habit did not endear him to the student radicals of the later sixties. "Freedom Now" was their cry. One Maoist pamphlet of the time described Frye as "the high priest of clerical obscurantism." These were probably Frye's unhappiest years as a teacher, and sometimes he felt himself quite isolated. But he continued to speak out forcefully.

NF The student activism of the sixties was something I had really very little sympathy with. It started out with a group of students in Berkeley feeling that they were not being paid attention to as students, something I could profoundly sympathize with. As it went on, they became more and more attracted by the cliches of revolutionary ideology and then they turned into something which was no longer intellectual. In fact, the thing that sickened me about the student movement was that it was an anti-intellectual movement in the one place in society where it had no business being, and once a student gets on a self-righteous kick, he becomes utterly impervious to argument because he's still too young and insecure to listen to anything except the applause of his own conscience. And I knew that that movement would fall dead in a very short time because it had no social roots. It wasn't like feminism or black emancipation or anything of that sort, with a real social cause behind it.

DC How was it anti-intellectual?

NF It was anti-intellectual in that it used the anarchist and neofascist tactics of breaking up meetings, occupying buildings and that kind of thing. The students felt they were doing something when they were doing this kind of nonsense.

DC Was the element of desperation in this something you could understand? Were you sympathetic to the feeling of unreality in the world that was provoking the student movement?

NF But it was a counter unreality that they were trusting in, and what I find hopeful about the present political situation all across the world is the gradual loss of belief in the validity of ideology qua ideology.

DC How did you respond to the demand for relevance? What did that slogan mean to you?

NF I said that it was a favorite word of Nazis.

DC Meaning?

NF Meaning that all this stuff is going in a neofascist direction. The Nazis talked about target knowledge, and that came to mean, sooner or later, that "useful" meant essential for waging war, and that attitude to the arts and sciences not only destroyed art and science in Germany for a whole generation, but it helped materially in losing the war for them.

DC The demand that the university curriculum be made “relevant” to the current interests of students Frye considered antithetical to the true purpose of a university. “It is precisely what is irrelevant about what we study,” Frye said during the sixties, “that is the liberalizing element in it.” Universities exist to unsettle our prejudices, not to reinforce them. As a teacher, Frye has lived this commitment to liberal education. But during the course of his career, the university has changed in ways that have made it harder to realize his ideals.

NF It’s changed as society has changed. The nineteenth-century university was the very small college which was the training ground for young gentlemen. It meant that all relations were personal ones between tutor and student, with their private hours. And as the university has begun to reflect more advanced industrial and technological conditions (and the world has, of course, become irremediably pluralistic in both the arts and sciences), it has to be a world of specialists. It can’t function otherwise. So you get a great deal of highly specialized scholarship which makes a problem for the person who still is teaching undergraduates and is still in that personal relationship. It throws more responsibility on the undergraduate too.

DC I wonder whether the university, as you would like it to be and as it must be to play the role you see for it in society, actually exists any longer except insofar as you continue to do what you—and there must be others like you—do.

NF The university as I would like it does not exist. The only thing you can do is to fight rearguard actions in small corners.

DC Did it once exist, or was it always an idea?

NF It was always an ideal, really, but where you have a small, intimate college with teachers and students personally known to one another, you have the possibility of the training ground for something closer to the ideal as I would see it.

DC Victoria College in the early thirties was close enough to this ideal to captivate Frye, as a student, and he retained a lifelong loyalty. Today, he is Victoria’s chancellor, a largely ceremonial position. But for eight years, he also occupied the much more demanding post of principal. Frye’s loyalty to Vic and the University of Toronto held even during the period of his greatest fame in the sixties, when various American universities tried to lure him away.

NF I was getting a great many offers to go elsewhere. I know there must have been people who felt that I was just playing with these offers and pretending to consider them, but that wasn’t true. Some of them involved very serious and in fact even agonizing decisions, but the questions that began to grow in my mind as I went on were, first of all, what religion was I closest to? Well, the United Church of Canada. What political party did I feel most in sympathy with? The CCF [Cooperative Commonwealth Federation], later the NDP [New Democratic Party]. Neither of those can be translated into American terms directly. And then, later on, when I became a better known public figure, I began to realize that there would be some feeling of resentment in Canada if I left. I couldn’t let that influence me beyond a point, but the feeling that there would be a certain betrayal to my leaving had as its flip side the feeling that I was making a contribution here, that I had a function here which I would not have had somewhere else. I also went through a period which impressed me a great deal when I was principal of Victoria: so many young people and academics who had gone from Canada to the United States wanted desperately to come back again.

DC During what period were you principal?

NF From 1959 to 1967.

DC That was a long time.

NF Oh, a hell of a long time.

DC And was it onerous?

NF Yes. That is, I had an extraordinarily conscientious and able president over me, Arthur Moore, and because of him it was a tolerable job, but it was not a congenial one.

DC How did you get it in the first place?

NF I seemed to be the fall guy—that was all. The fact that I was the academic head of the college made some sort of sense. I’ve always been a bit of a pushover for anything that can be sold to me as public service. That was why I stayed for nine bloody years on the CRTC [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission].

DC Well, I don’t know what it cut into, because it doesn’t seem to have cut into your writing.

NF No it didn’t cut into my writing.

DC You kept up a phenomenal writing schedule during that whole period: your books appeared almost annually. How did you do it?

NF Well, I had to, because my writing isn’t something I run. It runs me. I have to do what it says, and I had to give it priority. There was nothing else I could do. That meant, of course that I skimmed a good deal on my administrative duties, but there wasn’t any way out of it.

DC Frye was relieved of the job of principal in 1967. Today, the main burden Victoria imposes on him is the weight of his celebrity status. In 1983, Vic’s new academic building, where Frye has an office, was renamed Northrop Frye Hall. A bust of Frye commands the stairs as you enter. Next door, at the E. J. Pratt Library, one wall is dominated by an immense portrait which shows Frye seated as if on an invisible chair, in midair.

John Ayre Two or three years ago, I actually ran into him in the Vic library just looking through the old file index. That he was in the old card index and not even the new one, let alone the computer, is, I suppose, typical of Northrop Frye. And he looked rather furtive, because you could see this huge portrait actually right up on the wall nearby, and of course everybody knows who he is. He doesn’t like that kind of monumentalization. But at the same time, he’s gracious enough that if others think that that’s what should be done, then he’ll sort of go along with it.

DC Three years ago, after the death of his equally celebrated colleague C.B. MacPherson, Frye was asked to speak at the memorial service. In his remarks, Frye alluded wistfully to the days when he and MacPherson had been junior faculty and their encounters just the chance meeting of friends, not a collision of monuments. Those who have known Northrop Frye as a teacher are a tiny fraction of those who have known him as a writer. He has published more than twenty books, as well as numerous uncollected reviews, articles and other occasional pieces. Robert Denham’s annotated bibliography, listing writing by and about Frye, runs to more than 400 pages. But Frye the teacher is very much a part of Frye the writer. His encounter with students has given shape to his ideas. The classroom, much more than the private study, has been his laboratory.

NF Teaching to me is a way of trying out ideas. I used to say that I could never believe anything I said until I’d said it to students and watched their reaction, and I’ve always found that teaching and writing fed into each other. But I made up my mind almost at once as a lecturer that I would take no notes, that I would not write any notes for my lecture until after I’d given it.

DC What gets written down, in other words, is only what has already been proved in oral performance. It’s a principle requiring a fairly formidable memory, but audiences from Rome to Emory, Virginia, testify to having heard *ex tempore* from Frye’s lips what they have later read word for word in one of his books. It’s also a principle with interesting implications for the education of younger children, a subject in which Frye has always been interested.

NF In teaching youngsters to write, you throw a dead language at them and ask them to decipher it. And I think the obvious way to teach people to write is to listen to the way they talk and try to give some shape and direction to that talk as it goes on. There’s a great current of verbal energy that comes out of any child, and the one thing to do is to direct that, not to lead him into a sort of rat’s maze of subjects and predicates and objects before his time.

DC Well, we do see an extraordinary amount of fairly dead prose in the world at the moment. I know there are more people writing than ever before, but do you think there might be a relation between that and the absence of a current energy in their writing?

NF Yes. One thing I have attacked all my critical life is the notion that prose is the language of ordinary speech. The language of ordinary speech is associative, and prose is a very highly skilled, sophisticated

form of writing. Almost nobody speaks prose. It's a written form. People who approach it without having trained their speaking style give the impression of deciphering something from Linear B. They write what is in effect for them a dead language.

DC The liveliness of Frye's prose has made his work accessible to a much wider public than most literary critics can hope to address. Indeed, while Frye has been perfecting his trenchant form of public address, most literary critics have been going in the other direction. The critics generally lumped together as poststructuralists or deconstructionists are a very notable example. Why, Frye asked a few years ago, must they express their quite interesting ideas in a style which reminded him, he said, of a horse slurping water?

NF I felt as I went on, and as deconstructive, phenomenological, and other critical schools developed, that they were getting to a point where they could only talk to each other. In fact, I noticed that back in the Anatomy days, when I said that criticism had a mystery religion but no gospel. The was why I tended increasingly to address a general, cultivated public rather than primarily the scholarly or academic audience.

DC The style in which Frye addresses the public is marked by its penetrating wit, and this wit is not just an adornment, but the very heart of his approach. The style is the man. Often called a philosopher, Frye sees himself working within the spirit of poetry. Image, aphorism, and metaphor, much more than argument, direct his writing.

NF Most modes of thinking in words are founded on a subject/object split, the thing that Blake called the cloven fiction, and a descriptive writer, a scientist or a historian, works with a body of words and a body of events or things "out there." One reflects the other. A logical writer is writing so that one statement follows out of its predecessor. The rhetorical writer writes to produce a kinetic effect on his reader. The poet is the person who enters into a world where subject and object have become the same thing. They're different aspects of the same thing. It's a very primitive language, but the poet speaks it.

DC The aphoristic quality in your writing is very pronounced. How does that relate to your method of composition?

NF I keep notebooks and I write very short paragraphs in them. Everything I write is the insertion of continuity into those aphorisms.

DC Aphorisms express insight, and insights, not arguments, are what Frye's writings yield. His gift is to see things whole, and this wholeness of vision permeates each part of his writing. In a new book called *Northrop Frye: Anatomy of His Criticism*, Bert Hamilton quotes this single, portentous sentence from Frye's book, *Anatomy of Criticism*. "Literature is a human apocalypse," wrote Frye, "man's revelation to man, and criticism is not a body of adjudications, but the awareness of the revelation, the last judgment of mankind." Hamilton then claims that if this sentence alone of all Frye's writings had survived, he could still, like an anthropologist shaping Neanderthal man from one bone sliver, reconstruct the *Anatomy*. Bert Hamilton is a professor of English at Queen's University.

Bert Hamilton Frye has the very special quality of having an encompassing vision. First of all, all of his works, even his articles—he has written about 300 articles—all tend to be brief *Anatomys*. Anything Frye says is not part of a logical chain but really contains almost everything in miniature. Now, an apt analogy—and it's an appropriate one for Frye because of his background—is that he, like ministers or rabbis or other religious persons of authority, can take one passage from the Old or New Testament or the Koran and construct the whole basis of a religion out of it. It's called a pericope, I think, among preachers. You can take a passage of scripture and then elaborate from it the whole of Christian belief. Frye has a quality of centrality, of comprehensiveness, that allows him to say almost everything within a brief statement. I found this with students. They would ask, well now, what does Frye mean by this? And I discovered that in trying to say what Frye means I was led more and more broadly into everything that Frye means.

DC As a teacher and writer with an encompassing vision, Frye has reached out to the whole world. But this has never made him forget his Canadian roots. He has written for the CBC, served for nine years on the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission, and for ten years, wrote an annual review of English Canadian poetry for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. For him, there is simply no contradiction between his roots and his relevance to the wider world.

NF The longer I've lived, the more I realize that I belong in a certain context, just as a plant grows in the soil. The more completely I am in a Canadian context, the more acceptable I am to others. It's the law in literature I've often expressed by Faulkner's devoting his life to a country with an unpronounceable name in Mississippi and getting a Nobel Prize in Sweden.

DC Frye's writings on Canada and Canadian literature have been collected into two books. *The Bush Garden* and *Divisions on a Ground*. It's a measure of how influential they've been that many of the ideas in these books now seem like common sense. "It seems to me," Margaret Atwood wrote in 1981, "that almost every seminal idea in the newly watered fields of CanLit sprang from the forehead of Northrop Frye." Frye's vision of Canada begins, as does so much in his work, with an image, an image taken from his journey back to Canada when he returned to Toronto from Oxford in 1939.

NF In the 1930s, you had to go by ship—there weren't any transatlantic flights then—and I suddenly realized, when I was in the middle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, that I was surrounded by five Canadian provinces, all of them invisible, and that you don't get that kind of experience anywhere in the United States.

DC What did that image say to you?

NF Well, it said Jonah and the whale, more or less, and the sense of being surrounded on all sides by a frontier, instead of having the frontier over there on the west, which was the American experience.

DC How does your idea of a garrison relate to this insight, the idea that there was a garrison mentality in early Upper Canada?

NF I was trying to explain in that phrase the psychological effects, first of all, of the Anglo-French war for the possession of the country, and then the anxieties and moral compulsions of living in a small town which was as totally isolated as Canadian communities were. I knew something of cultural isolation from having been brought up in Moncton in the twenties.

DC Frye's concept of a garrison mentality in nineteenth-century Canada expressed the difference he saw between this country and the United States. The U.S. had a definite eastern seaboard and its settlement patterns moved westward towards a definite frontier. Canada, by contrast, swallowed its settlers. Frontiers surrounded them on all sides. The differences also extended to the two country's politics. The U.S. proceeded deductively within the stable framework of its enlightened eighteenth-century Constitution. Canada, quite untouched by the enlightenment, lurched inductively from one precarious compromise to the next, torn by competing empires and fractured by its massive and forbidding geography. This led Frye to perceive what he called an argumentative tone in early Canadian writing, and it suggested why Canadian literature developed more slowly than American literature. Canadians were just too obsessed with questions of who they were and where they were and where their fundamental loyalties lay to allow literature the imaginative room it needed to grow.

NF Your normal forum of linguistic communication is an argumentative one. That is, you have in every Canadian small town half a dozen churches representing different sets of propositions and you used to have a conservative-liberal dialectic politically, which led to a good deal of eloquence and rhetorical passion, but that was the way that Canadians instinctively used words. They didn't use them imaginatively or metaphorically.

DC Canada, as far as Frye is concerned, spent its youth debating the propositions which divided its peoples and its parts, and this kept Canadian writing centered in subliterate forms of expression—sermons, political speeches, and the like.

NF Every proposition is a half-truth, is a half-proposition that contains its opposite. That means that using words as propositions is a militant use of words, and to use words metaphorically is to get out of that militant dialectic. But it takes a good deal of security to get to that stage.

DC Canada did eventually get there, in Frye's view, but not by becoming a unified nation. It got there through the maturation of regional identities. The cultural imagination, Frye has said, always has something vegetable about it. It needs to put down roots and draw sustenance from its own soil.

NF You get books like Lower's *Colony to Nation*, but actually you find that in culture, at any rate, Canada goes from the provincial to the regional, which is the more mature form of provincial culture, without

going through the national phase at all. Canada is too big and too divided to be a cultural entity. There are no Canadian writers, but there are southern Ontario and British Columbia writers, Maritime and Quebec writers, and when you add them together, you get a Canadian culture with a distinctive feeling of its own.

DC I think I've heard you say that when writers wanted to be Canadian, that was when they couldn't write, in effect.

NF You can't be Canadian by an effort of will. The whole conception behind it is too amorphous. "O, child of nations giant limbed." That's Charles G. D. Roberts harrumphing about the Confederation era, but that's not poetry, that's not culture, that's not anything except a manufactured sentiment.

DC So when do you see this regional centering of culture really begin to acquire strength and authority?

NF Well, the difference between the provincial and the regional, as I see it, is that the provincial regards itself as importing its cultural standards from somewhere else, either England or France. So you import your standards, and of course the standards are out of date by the time they arrive. Then, eventually, writers become more aware of international currents sweeping across the world, and those currents bring with them the idea that cultural standards cannot be met, they can only be established by the writer himself. So you take on international qualities in style which are not homogenizing qualities because they take root in different soils in different areas. So that Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Alice Munro and so forth are very solidly rooted in southern Ontario, but they are not, like Stephen Leacock, provincial writers in the sense of being "branch plant" writers. They use the international techniques and devices that are used across the world, but they're very different from other writers that use them elsewhere. It's swallowing an internal idiom in order to mature and establish your own standards instead of accepting standards from elsewhere.

DC When and from what writers do you begin to date this?

NF I think if you read a book like Knister's *White Narcissus*, you see a very conscientious, carefully written book which nevertheless seems to reflect standards established elsewhere—standards, not techniques, devices, or idioms. So I would call it a very good provincial novel. With Sara Jeanette Duncan's *Imperialist*, you're beginning to move from something provincial into something regional, and by Morley Callahan's time, where he's taking on international influence through Gilson and Maritain, of course, you've moved into the regional period which has escaped the provincial. From then on it's an open field.

DC Frye's account of the development of Canadian literature places it in its larger geopolitical matrix. He's been a sort of map-maker of the Canadian imagination. In fact, Margaret Atwood has suggested that there's a connection between Frye's attempt to comprehend the inhuman vastness of the Canadian landscape and his attempt to map all of literature in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye's heavy emphasis on environmental factors in Canadian history links him to thinkers like Donald Creighton, Marshall McLuhan, and Harold Innis, all once colleagues at the University of Toronto. Like Innis and McLuhan in particular, Frye has also noticed that the other great force shaping Canadian development is technology. He's observed, for example, in the epic poems of his friend and one-time colleague, E. J. Pratt, poems which he considers turning points in English Canadian literature, poems in which the central actors may be railways or radar installations. Technology in Canada overcomes isolation, but Frye, typically balanced, has also noted how it imposes a new isolation as technology itself becomes our new environment.

NF There is a more pernicious tendency in the human mind to project onto machinery the qualities of external autonomy. Man invents the wheel, and in no time he's talking nonsense about a wheel of fate or a wheel of fortune, or a wheel as a cosmological thing which is alienating him from himself. He invents the book and he starts talking about the Book of Life in which all your sins are recorded. He invents the computer, and God knows what he's projecting out of that. But it's all superstition.

DC Frye believes that our inventions can enslave us only if we let them, but he recognizes that as technology improves, it does tend to make people more withdrawn or introverted and can therefore break down society.

NF In the technological developments that I've lived through in the twentieth century, I do see that each new stage brings with it an intensifying of the introverted. That's simply a hazard which has to be overcome. But it seems to be obvious that in the stage play, you have an ensemble performance for an audience. The existence of the audience as a consensus, as a group, is very important. Then you move into the movie, where the audience sits in the dark, where it's individualized but it's still an audience. Then you move into the television set, where you don't leave your living room. Similarly, the ocean liner is the place for romance and endless discussions and social movements of all kinds. In the jet plane, you just sit there, and the guy beside you sits there, and that's it.

DC So what are the consequences of that? It's not a happy picture, this growing introversion.

NF Well, it's a hazard which has to be overcome. I think that nobody quite realized during the unrest of the sixties that a great deal of it had to do with the panic caused by television and the need to absorb it. I think as time goes on, people do absorb it, bring it under control. Right now, there's a similar fear that computers will increase introversion to practically a solipsistic point, where people will simply be locked up in their own private jails. Again, that's a hazard. It's something that I think eventually we'll learn to control.

DC Could you explain a little more why the sixties were a panic caused by television?

NF It was a matter of the saturation with images. If you're totally dependent on visual images, it causes a good deal of confusion. Is that stone dame over there Venus or Juno or Minerva? If it's a matter of hearing, you don't have that particular problem. But certainly the saturation of images almost dissipates one's sense of identity until you begin to get control of it.

DC And you see that that control is beginning to be evident?

NF Well, I think in the course of time, yes, it has become more and more what a machine ought to be, which is an extension of a personality and not an independent personality set against you.

DC Frye's view of technology is highly characteristic of the man. He sees technology's demonic side, but only as a hazard, not as an inescapable destiny. More pessimistic thinkers have seen technology as overmastering society. Frye, fundamentally an optimist, rejects that possibility out of hand. For him, society is always contested between the forces of life and death, always poised between liberation and enslavement. But wherever society stands at the moment in these recurring cycles, redemption remains an inextinguishable possibility.

NF We have gone through history thinking of peace as meaning the war has stopped. Consequently a lot of people, when you use a word like peace, say well, a world of peace sounds awfully dull, there'd be nothing to do if there's nothing to fight about. What I would go for is Blake's "I will not cease from mental fight till we have built Jerusalem."

[The third and final part of *The Ideas of Northrop Frye* will appear in the next issue of the *Newsletter*.]

Frye Bibliography

The list that follows continues the supplements to the Frye bibliography that have appeared in previous issues of the *Newsletter*. Entry numbers, as well as cross-references (A5, M10, etc.), either follow or extend the system of classification in *Northrop Frye: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987), or else they refer to previous entries in the *Newsletter*. My thanks, as always, to Jane Widdicombe, and to others who have sent me materials: Carl Mollins, Hugh Anson-Cartwright, Bert Hamilton, Robert Brandeis, Lila Laasko, Erlin Sills, David Staines, Robert Benne, Greta Coger, Gene Rasor, John Lang, Jonathan Greene, Baldo Meo, Sid Feshbach, William A. Johnsen, Robert Cluett, Margaret Burgess, Maureen McGowan, and Alvin Lee. I invite readers to send me copies of essays, reviews, and other materials for inclusion in the next supplement. (Ed.)

Primary Sources

A. Books

A2 *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Selection from pp. 134-40 rpt. in *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present: A Reader*. Ed. Raman Selden. London: Longman, 1988, 355-59.

A2n *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Korean Student Edition N.p.: United Publishing and Promotion Co., Ltd., 1984. x + 383 pp. A paperback rpt. of A2e. "This Korean Student Edition is exclusively authorized by Princeton University Press for manufacture and distribution within the Republic of Korea."

A2o *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Taipei: Bookman Books, Ltd., n.d. A paperback rpt. of A2e. "This is an authorized Taiwan edition published under special arrangement with the proprietor for sale in Taiwan only."

A23g *Shakespeare: Nove lezioni*. Trans. Andrea Carosso. Turin: Einaudi, 1990. x + 201 pp. Paperback. Italian trans. of A23.

A24b *On Education*. Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1990. 211 pp. Paperback ed. of A24.

A29 *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 124 pp. Hardcover. A revision and expansion of a series of lectures given at Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, during May 1990. F characterizes the book as "something of a shorter and more accessible version" of *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*. In four chapters, F contrasts the natural or physical vision of the world with the inward, spiritual one as each relates to language, time, history, and the concept of God.

C. Monographs

C13 *The Cultural Development of Canada*. Massey College, 1990. An address to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Associated Scholars at Hart House, University of Toronto, 17 October 1990. 11 pp. Wrappers. Rpt. as "Northrop Frye's Canada" in *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1991: A17. The last formal address F gave at the University of Toronto, this talk is a somewhat different version of the argument developed in "Levels of Cultural Identity" (D306).

D. Essays and Parts of Books

D37 "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleiffer. New York: Longman, 1989, 541-52; and in *Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present*. Ed. Robert Con Davis and Laura Finke. New York: Longman, 1989, 656-67.

D99 "Editor's Introduction" to *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt* rpt. in French in *Ellipse* 41 (1989): 92-103. Trans. Claudette Laprise.

D173 "On Value Judgments" rpt. in *Kritik in der Krise: Theorie der Amerikanischen Literaturkritik*. Ed. Jürgen Schlaeger. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1986. 99-105.

D309 "Language as the Home of Human Life." *Salute to Scholarship: Essays Presented at the Official Opening of Athabasca University*. Ed. Michael Owen. Athabasca University, 1986. 20-33. For annotation, see I178.

D310 “Varieties of Eighteenth-Century Sensibility.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (Winter 1990-91): 157-72. Part of a special issue, *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Examines the intensely social view of literature within the Augustan age and the way this view was interpenetrated by a sense of the solitary individual and by laissez-faire economic assumptions. Looks also at the different forms of primitivism in the eighteenth-century: the conception of natural society in Burke, the epistemological primitive in Locke, the acquisitive primitive in Mandeville, the psychological primitive in Hartley, the social primitive in Bage, and various forms of the emotional, melancholy, and evangelical primitive. “All of these contributed to the process of pushing back the boundaries imposed on poetic experience that were assumed by most of the Augustans.”

D311 “Response.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (Winter 1990-91): 243-49. Ostensibly a reply to L851, L855, and L859, but F mainly reviews the different contexts surrounding his writing of the *Anatomy* and his assumption that holism is the beginning, not the end, of the critical enterprise.

F. Miscellaneous

F93 “Foreword.” Viola Whitney Pratt: Papers and Speeches and *Viola Whitney Pratt: A Testament of Love*. Toronto, Lugus, 1990. xi and ix respectively. Brief comments on Pratt’s work. F hopes that these two volumes “will bring [Pratt’s] extraordinary range of interests and her eloquent style into focus and public attention.”

G. Interviews

G71 “The Bible and English Literature.” *Arts: The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association* 13 (1987-88): 17-25. Edited by David Lawton. F begins with a statement on the creation stories in Genesis and then responds to a series of questions about the two different creation accounts.

G72 “Glimpses of a Boundless Mind.” *Maclean’s* 104 (4 Feb. 1991): 51. Selections from an interview with Carl Rollins about Canadian political and cultural life. Recorded eight weeks before F’s death.

G73 “Frye at the Forum.” *Canadian Forum* (March 1991): 15-17. Interviewer: Hilda Kirkwood. F responds to questions about his association as literary editor and editor of the *Canadian Forum*.

Secondary Sources

K. Books

K1 Addition to reviews of John Ayre, *Northrop Frye: A Biography*

Adamson, Joseph. “Frye Redivivus: The Semiotic Implications of His Criticism.” *The Semiotic Review of Books* 1 (May 1990): 8–10 [8–9].

K1a Ayre, John. *Northrop Frye: A Biography*. Toronto: Vintage, 1990. Paperback rpt. of K1.

K9 Additions to reviews of A. C. Hamilton, *Northrop Frye: Anatomy of His Criticism*

Adamson, Joseph. “Frye Redivivus: The Semiotic Implications of His Criticism.” *The Semiotic Review of Books* 1 (May 1990): 8–10 [9–10].

K11 Addition to reviews of Robert D. Denham, *Northrop Frye: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*

David Rampton, *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 37 (1988): 181-83.

K12 Addition to reviews of Ian Balfour, *Northrop Frye*

Adamson, Joseph. "Frye Redivivus: The Semiotic Implications of His Criticism." *The Semiotic Review of Books* 1 (May 1990): 8–10 [9].

L. Essays and Parts of Books

L846 Barkley, Christine. "Donaldson as Heir to Tolkien." *Mythlore* 38 (Spring 1984): 50-57. Uses F's theory of modes to chart the differences between Tolkien's Bilbo and Frodo (high mimetic and low mimetic heroes respectively) and Donaldson's Covenant (an ironic hero though moving toward a mythical one).

L847 Clark, Sandra. *William Shakespeare: "The Tempest."* [Penguin Critical Studies] London: Penguin, 1988. 73. In her final chapter, "Criticism of *The Tempest*," Clark discusses briefly F's interpretation of the play as a romance.

L848 Evans, Malcolm. "Deconstructing Shakespeare's Comedies." *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis. London: Methuen, 1985. 67-94 [76-85]. On the ways that deconstruction is said to have undermined F's structural and thematic reading of the comedies.

L849 Gorak, Jan. "Northrop Frye and the Visionary Canon." *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*. London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1991. 120-52. Examines F's concept of the canon and its relation to conceptions of the canon in the work of Sir Ernst Gombrich, Frank Kermode, and Edward Said. Argues that F's sees every literary work as canonical "because he sees each work as an episode in the imagination's coherent creative world." F's view of the canon moves away from institutionalizing the status quo and toward destabilizing secular culture. It emphasizes the primitive and the universal, relies on structural patterns to unify it, is visionary and Romantic, and is rooted in the redemptive myth of Christianity. Gorak believes the religious base of F's post-*Anatomy* criticism has moved it in the direction of a kind of dogma that "steers dangerously close to false prophecy," but it remains a powerful narrative of alienation and renewal.

L850 Heyne, Eric. "The Literary Status of Nonfiction Narratives." *Narrative Poetics: Innovations, Limits, Challenges*, ed. James Phelan. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1986-87. [Vol. 5 of *Papers in Comparative Studies*.] Uses F's idea of the separation of literature from life as a foil to develop his criteria for the literary status of nonfiction narratives.

L851 Hunter, J. Paul. "Novels and History and Northrop Frye." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (Winter 1990-91): 225-41. Part of a special issue, *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Although F will be probably seen as the most significant literary theorist of the century, his way of reading literature, especially eighteenth-century literature and particularly the novel, is limited. His notion that novels are displaced forms of romances is not firmly grounded and the values of his literary universe (the shared convention, the structural, the mythic, the universal) leave little room for the historical particularity of the novel: "The novel as a species is messy, digressive, inclusive, circumstantial, temporal, and subjective. These are not honored characteristics in Frye's scheme, his esthetic, or his moral and mythological universe."

L852 Johnsen, William A. "Elementary English." *Centennial Review* 34 (Fall 1990): 457-83. A revised version of L704.

L853 Kavanagh, James. H. "Shakespeare in Ideology." *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis. London: Methuen, 1985. 144-65. [164-65]. Takes issue with F's claim that the only principles that concerned Shakespeare were those of dramatic structure.

L854 Pietropaolo, Domenico. "Frye, Blake, e la boria dei dotti." *Allegoria* 1 (Dec. 1989): 134-38.

L855 Rothstein, Eric. "Anatomy and Bionomics of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Cases." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (Winter 1990-91): 197-223. Part of a special issue, *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Finds that the panoramic map of literature F draws in the *Anatomy* cannot account for much of what is valuable and distinctive in eighteenth-century literature.

L856 Stewart, Philip. "Roman[ce]: romanzi vecchi e nuovi." Trans. Georgio Zanetti. *Intersezioni* 2 (1982): 574-76. On the influence on F's distinction between the directions of novel and romance.

L857 Stoddard, William. "A Critical Approach to Fantasy with Application to *Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore* 37 (Winter 1984): 8-13. Argues that F's theories of narrative patterns, modes, and images offer "a means of becoming more sensitive to" the literary conventions of *Lord of the Rings*, and they help "to define the place of contemporary fantasy in literature as a whole."

L858 Weinbrot, Howard D. "Introduction" to *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*. *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (Winter 1990-91): 155-56. An account of the special session on F at the 1990 meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-century Studies. For the papers in this special issue, see D310, D311, L851, L855, and L859.

L859 _____. "Northrop Frye and the Literature of Process Reconsidered." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (Winter 1990-91): 173-95. Part of a special issue, *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Argues that in "Towards Defining a Age of Sensibility" (D82) F overstates the thesis that the literature of the late eighteenth century is a literature of Longinian process rather than Aristotelian product. Cites examples of "process" in the first half of the century and "product" in the second half: the two types of literature are "intertwined," and "the distinctions between them can be as constraining as those among putative Augustans, pre-Romantics, and Romantics."

M. Reviews

M14. NORTHROP FRYE ON SHAKESPEARE

M14 White, R. S. *Shakespeare Survey Annual* 41 (1989): 194.

M26. WORDS WITH POWER

M26.9 Adams, Robert M. "God and the Critics." *New York Times Book Review* 31 Mar. 1991: 14-15. A tribute to the singular qualities of F's "far-ranging, fantastic, yet orderly and disciplined mind." Says that F "was one of the bold, inventive—and unhappily rare—schematizers of our literature. Even those of us who never came completely under his influence must recognize the imaginative force he exerted, and regret his going."

M26.10 Ages, Arnold. "Words with Power Finds a Vision of Life in Bible." *Kansas City Star* [Missouri] 6 January 1990. Says that if one can persevere through the thickets of F's special language, "the reward can be substantial."

- M26.11 Anon. "Finding the Bonds Uniting Bible and Literature." *Philadelphia Inquirer* 23 December 1990. Places the book in the context of Frye's life and other books, and glances at some of the conventional judgments about his work. "Like it or not, Frye sits like a massive island in literature's harbor, forcing every student to navigate him."
- M26.12 Beard, Craig W. *Library Journal* 115 (15 Nov. 1990): 72.
- M26.13 Corn, Alfred. "From Genesis to Revelations." *Washington Post Book World* 20 (23 Dec. 1990): 5, 8. "The *Great Code* and its sequel *Words with Power* remind me of Wagner's Ring cycle: You may plunge in at any point and find something remarkable under way, gods and mortals acting in opposition or concert, mythological relationships being developed with strength and amplitude. But the plot advances neither rapidly nor directly, and there are frequent recapitulations. Even so, by the conclusion of the book Frye seems to have crossed some sort of bridge, leaving the objective stance of academic criticism behind, and to account it a world well lost."
- M26.14 Kakutani, Michiko. "Symbiosis of Bible and Literature." *New York Times* 4 Dec. 1990: C19. Finds the first half of the book "turgid and overly pedantic, as though Mr. Frye were simply reworking earlier assertions, while trying to answer questions raised by other critics." The second half, however, "intermittently makes for lively and provocative reading."
- M26.15 Kort, Wesley A. *America* 6 April 1991: 382-84. Examines F's arguments for the continuity of the Bible's centrifugal and the ways that the concepts of myth and God figure in his thesis. "Frye bequeaths a grand hypothesis, one a person can work, nay, even live, with. The test of it is not so much where it is right and wrong but rather what, when employed as a way of reading the Bible and literature, it brings to light and life."
- M26.16 Yan, Peter. "Frye Concludes a Fearful, Mythic Journey." *Varsity* 8 January 1991: 13.
- M27. MYTH AND METAPHOR
- M27.1 Anon. *Washington Post Book World* 20 (23 Dec. 1990): 13. Brief notice.
- M27.2 Anon. *The Griffin* 41 (Apr. 1991): 8. Brief notice.
- M27 *Wilson Quarterly* (Spring 1991): 96-97.
- M27.3 Yan, Peter. "Frye Concludes a Fearful, Mythic Journey." *Varsity* 8 Jan. 1991: 13. Brief notice in a review devoted mostly to *Words with Power*.
- M29. THE DOUBLE VISION
- M29 Anon. *University of Toronto Press Catalogue*, Spring-Summer 1991: 6. Overview of the book in advance of publication.
- P. Miscellaneous
- P234 Groen, Rick. "How Northrop Frye Helped Me Connect Feelings to Words." *Globe and Mail* 1 January 1991: C1.

- P235 Kapica, Jack. "Frye's Legacy Continues at U of T." *Globe and Mail* 12 April 1991. News story on the question of whether F's course on the Bible, "The Mythological Framework of Western Culture," will, following his death, continue to be taught at the University of Toronto.
- P236 [Mollins, Carl]. "Words to Free the Spirit: Northrop Frye." *Maclean's* 103 (31 December 1990): 12–13. A tribute to the achievements of F, who is recognized here as one of twelve Canadians on Maclean's 1990 Honor Roll. Mollins gives a brief biographical sketch and notes F's contributions as a teacher and scholar.
- P237 Taylor, Kate. "48 Views of Frye Reveal Little of the Man." *Globe and Mail* 8 Mar. 1991: C8. Review of Arnaud Maggs's photographs of Frye, on display at the Cold City Gallery. "The subject is shown 48 times, 24 in profile and 24 face on, in poses that vary so little that it takes close examination to determine that these are not simply multiple prints of two single images. Frye stares out at us with utter composure, revealing little; Maggs is not interested in portraiture, choosing to coolly document features rather than research character."

Obituaries, Tributes, Memorials

Shortly after Frye's death on Jan. 23, 1991, a number of obituary notices, memorial reflections, and tributes appeared in magazines and newspapers across the world. The following have come to my attention. (Ed.)

- Abbate, Gay. "Frye's Legacy: Scholarship, Loyalty, Humanity: Lighting a Path for Those Who Follow." *University of Toronto Bulletin* 4 Feb. 1991: 6-7.
- Anon. *Globe and Mail* 25 Jan. 1991: D8.
- Anon. *Toronto Star* 26 Jan. 1991: D7.
- Anon. "Literary Critic Rode Subway Daily to Work." *Niagara Falls Review* 24 Jan. 1991: 7.
- Anon. "Critic Northrop Frye Dead at 78." *Toronto Star* 23 Jan. 1991: 28.
- Anon. "Anatomising Literature" *The Guardian* [London and Manchester] 25 Jan. 1991: 39.
- Anon. "Frye's Genius Recalled in Tributes." *Toronto Star* 24 Jan. 1991: D1.
- Anon. "Literary Critic Dies." *Richmond Times-Dispatch* 24 Jan. 1991: B2.
- Anon. "Northrop Frye." *Times* [London] 26 Jan. 1991: 12.
- Anon. "Northrop Frye." *Toronto Star* 24 Jan. 1991: A26. [Editorial].
- Anon. "La morte in Canada di Frye: critica e societ...." *Il Gazzettino* [Venice] 25 Jan. 1991.
- Anon. "É morto Northrop Frye teorico della letteratura." *Corriere della Sera* 25 Jan. 1991.
- Anon. "É morto il critico Northrop Frye." *Il Giornale* 25 Jan. 1991.
- Anon. "É morto il critico Northrop Frye." *Il Tempo* 25 Jan. 1991.
- Anon. "É morto a Toronto Northrop Frye risali al 'profondo' dell'opera letteraria." *Gazzetta del Sud* 25 Jan. 1991.
- Anon. "Northrop Frye." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 24 Jan. 1991: 4C.
- Anon. "Northrop Frye." *The Daily Telegraph* 25 Jan. 1991: 19.
- Anon. *Newsweek* 4 Feb. 1991: 76.
- Anon. "Remembering Frye." *Globe and Mail* 26 Jan. 1991: C10.
- Anon. *Time* 4 Feb. 1991: 61.
- Atwood, Margaret. "The Great Communicator." *Globe and Mail* 24 Jan. 1991: C1.
_____. [Tribute]. *Brick* 40 (1991): 3.
- Barber, David. "The Formidable Scholar." *The Whig-Standard Magazine* 2 Feb. 1991: 5. [Based on an interview with A. C. Hamilton.]

- Barnes, Bart. "Canadian Literary Critic Northrop Frye Dies at 78." *Washington Post* 24 Jan. 1991: D6.
- Barilli, Renato. "Frye, corsi e ricorsi della letteratura." *Corriere della Sera* 27 January 1991.
- Bemrose, John. "The Great Decoder: Northrop Frye Explored Culture's Myths." *Maclean's* 104 (4 Feb. 1991): 51-52.
- Bissell, Claude T. "Northrop Frye Remembered." *University of Toronto Magazine* 18 (Spring 1991): 10.
- Brown, Gord. "Norrie's Wisdom Lives on in His Writings and Students." *the newspaper* [Univ. of Toronto] 30 Jan. 1991: 5.
- C., G. "Northrop Frye, dalla Bibbia alla civilté della parola." *La Stampa* 25 Jan. 1991.
- C., R. "É morto Frye l'innovatore." *La Nazione* 25 January 1991.
- Cosway, John. "Changes." *The Sunday Sun* [Toronto], 27 Jan. 1991: 109.
- Dahlin, Karina. "U of T Remembers Its Greatest Humanist." *University of Toronto Bulletin* 4 Feb. 1991: 1-2.
- Downey, Donn. "Literary Scholar Regarded as Great Cultural Figure." *Globe and Mail* 24 Jan. 1991: D6.
- Fisher, Douglas. "A Frydolator Remembers." *Toronto Sun* 25 Jan. 1991: 11.
- _____. "Frye was Right about Quebec." *The Sunday Sun* [Toronto] 27 Jan. 1991: C3.
- Flint, Peter. "Northrop Frye, 78, Literary Critic, Theorist and Educator, Is Dead." *New York Times* 25 Jan. 1991: B14.
- Forst, Graham. "Remembering Norrie, Critic and Teacher." *Vancouver Sun* 26 Jan. 1991: D24.
- Fulford, Robert. "Frye's Soaring Cathedral of Thought." *Globe and Mail* 26 Jan. 1991: C16.
- Guarini, Ruggero. "Una vita per due gemelle, bellezza e verità." *Il Messaggero* 25 Jan. 1991.
- Hamilton, A. C. "Northrop Frye: 1912-1991." *Quill & Quire* 57 (Mar. 1991).
- Jensen, Bo Green. "Kritikeren, Northrop Frye, 78 †r." *Weekendavisen* [Denmark] 1 Feb. 1991.
- J[ohnson], P[hil]. "A Tribute to Northrop Frye." *Pietisten* 6 (April 1991): 5.
- Juneau, Pierre. "The Power of Frye's Words." *The Financial Post* 28 Jan. 1991: 8.
- Kenner, Hugh. "Northrop Frye, R I P." *National Review* 43 (25 Feb. 1991): 19.
- Lee, Alvin. "Northrop Frye: 1912-1991." *The McMaster Courier* 12 Feb. 1991: 5.
- Lee, Hope. "Tribute to Northrop Frye." Presented on the CBC Sunday Morning Program, 27 Jan. 1991. Typescript, 1 p.
- Lombardo, Agostino, Baldo Meo, and Piero Boitani. "Il Pagione [A Tribute to Frye]." Broadcast on Italian Radio—RAI, 19 Feb. 1991, at 4:30 p.m.
- Marchand, Philip. "Frye Really Believed that Literature Could Save Society." *Toronto Star* 24 Jan. 1991: D1.
- _____. "Premier, Friends Pay Tribute to Northrop Frye." *Toronto Star* 30 Jan. 1991: E1, E6.
- Meo, Baldo. "Northrop Frye e i nuovi furori della critica letteraria." *l'Unita* 25 Jan. 1991: 19.
- Miller, Daniel. "Northrop Frye Remembered by U of T." *the newspaper* [Univ. of Toronto] 30 Jan. 1991: 10.
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- Nolan, Nicole, and Hilary Williams. "Memorial for Frye." *The Strand* [Victoria Univ.] 30 Jan. 1991: 1.
- Outram, Richard. "In Memory of Northrop Frye." *Globe and Mail* 16 Feb. 1991: C16.
- Placido, Beniamino. "È morto Northrop Frye." *La Repubblica* 25 January 1991.
- Polizoes, Elias. "Northrop Frye's Legacy Pivotal." *Varsity* [Univ. of Toronto] 25 Jan. 1991: 12.
- Reaney, James. "Northrop Frye: He Educated Our Imagination." *Toronto Star* 24 Jan. 1991: A27.
- Sewell, Gregory. "Literary Critic Northrop Frye Dead." *Varsity* [Univ. of Toronto] 25 Jan. 1991: 1.
- Stefani, Claudio. "Il molto reverendo Frye." *Il Resto del Carlino* 25 January 1991.
- Thompson, Clive. "Frye First and Foremost a Great Teacher." *The Strand* 30 Jan. 1991: 5.

Literature as Therapy

Northrop Frye

The following address was presented in the Samya Moranis Chris Special Lecture Series on Science and Culture on 23 November 1989 at Mt. Sinai Hospital, Toronto. Frye spoke from notes, rather than a manuscript, and the lecture was taped by Dr. John Roder, who kindly provided me a copy of the tape. (Ed.)

When I was looking over the connections that came to my mind between literature, more particularly English literature, and the medical profession, I remembered that in the Middle Ages the doctors had a popular reputation for skepticism and that there was a medieval proverb that said that wherever there are three doctors there are at least two atheists. When Chaucer introduces a physician on his Canterbury pilgrimage, he remarks that "His studye was but litel on the Bible," and that was a sort of in-joke, picking up the general assumption. That notion lasted even as late as the seventeenth century, when Sir Thomas Browne, who was a doctor himself, wrote a book called *Religio Medici*, the doctor's religion, which, even at that time, was a catchy title because a doctor's religion would sound like something of a paradox. In fact, Browne speaks in his opening sentence of the general scandal of his profession. Nevertheless, he writes a book on his religion, because it relieves him of the tedium of what he elsewhere calls "the futile portense of uroscopy."

Well, considering how much hysteria there was at that time about the smallest deviation in doctrine, to say nothing of atheism, one wonders why this remained on the level of a relatively harmless joke. One or two things occur to me on that point. There's a very shrewd comment in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* about a doctor who had a reputation for being a skeptic, but, instead of that ruining his reputation in a small Victorian town, his skepticism actually raised his stock very considerably because his patients greatly preferred to deal with somebody who thought entirely in terms of natural causes and natural cures. Then again, the doctors' study of medicine, which at that time was derived very largely from Galen, was intensely materialistic, in the sense of dealing with the body and the mind as a single and indivisible unit. Of course, the practice of medicine then was full of magic, but it was based on the conception of natural sympathies and natural antipathies, a notion which we'll come to later in the context of literature.

A key idea in Chaucer's day was the conception of what we call complexion or temperament. Both words mean mixture, and they referred to the balancing of the four humors or liquids of the body, together with the balancing of the seven planetary influences under which the patient was born. The doctor of Chaucer's time would look first of all to see what complexion or temperament his patient had. His pharmacopia was a much more elaborate one than we would use now. He would use lapidaries, that is, treatises on precious stones, all of which had some use, and herbals, because there was no herb growing in the ground that was not of some use. That is typical of the medieval mind: there is nothing in the world that does not refer directly to human values.

A good deal of what we think of as Chaucer's freshness and insight, his concrete view of people, is actually made up of these observations about humors and planetary temperaments. He says of his Franklin, for example, "of his complexion he was sanguin." That is, of the four humors the blood was the one that dominated in his complexion. That would immediately for Chaucer's readers have summoned up a picture of a ruddy-faced English country squire. The medical principle that came from this was that you were liable to certain diseases because of the temperament or complexion you were born with. If you well

tall and dark and sallow, you were probably of a melancholy temperament, probably born under Saturn or the moon, and you would be liable especially to emotional mental disorders or to such diseases as jaundice. If you were short and thick-set and quick tempered and red-headed, you were choleric and probably born under Mercury. That meant that you would be liable to whatever Chaucer's contemporaries recognized as high blood-pressure.

The interesting thing about this knowledge was that it was available to the layman, as well as to the doctor—a fact that sometimes rather disturbed the medical profession. The Wife of Bath, for example, in telling the story of her life, explains her numerous love affairs by the fact that she was born under a conjunction of Mars and Venus, who, as we remember from Greek mythology, carried on in a rather uninhibited way. In *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, which is a story about a cock and a hen, the hen feels that there is something the matter with her husband and, with the greatest confidence, prescribes remedies for him out of the best authorities, having clearly read the fourteenth-century equivalent of *The Reader's Digest*.

In Shakespeare's day this theory of humors and, to a large degree, planetary temperaments were still there, except that of the four humors—the sanguine, the phlegmatic, the choleric, and the melancholic—the melancholic one had assumed the leadership and was the supreme example of the mental/physical disease. You are probably familiar with the wonderful passage in *Macbeth*, where Macbeth, in discussing his wife's illness with a doctor, says in a remarkably prophetic passage,

*Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
Pluck from a memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?*

All the doctor says is, "Therein the patient must minister to himself," and so Macbeth says, "Throw physic to the dogs. I'll none of it." Well, the reason why the doctor makes this extremely helpless and unenterprising answer is that he sees quite clearly that there's a lot going on in Lady Macbeth's mind that he can't afford to get mixed up with. Consequently, he simply backs out, and that is what earns him the contemptuous remark of Macbeth.

In the second scene of *Hamlet*, we have the court of Denmark all dressed up in their best court finery and Hamlet, just a little withdrawn, dressed in black clothes, allegedly in mourning for the death of his father. The audience of Shakespeare's day would see at once that Hamlet was of a melancholy disposition. They would not be at all surprised at the fact that the scene ends with Hamlet reciting a soliloquy expressing a nauseated vision of the world. But although the physical side of melancholy was left out of *Hamlet*, it was in Shakespeare's day a physical disease, and at the end of the seventeenth century there was a song book published under the title of *Pills to Purge Melancholy*. The conception of the humor lingered on in various forms. Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's younger contemporary, invented a type of comedy in which the humor becomes a kind of obsession, such as miserliness or hypochondria, of which the chief character is either cured or not cured by the end of the action of play.

A little later than Shakespeare we have Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a great encyclopedic treatise on this mental and physical disease. The physical reason for it was the excess of what was called "black bile," but it extended over the entire psychiatric area as well. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*—I'm expressing my own opinion here—is one of the supreme masterpieces of English literature. It ranks with Chaucer and the novels of Dickens as a survey of the life contemporary with him, except that it uses books instead of characters. Sir William Osler of McGill paid it the rather chilly and left-handed compliment by saying that it was the greatest book on medicine ever written by a nonmedical person. Burton was an Oxford don and a clergyman. Samuel Johnson paid it a much higher and much more concrete compliment when he said it was the only book that ever got him out of bed to read two hours earlier than he wanted to.

As Burton deals with the disease, melancholy tends to spread over the entire area of human feelings and inadequacies of both body and mind. In the three long volumes of the *Anatomy* there are some amazing digressions. There is, first of all, a “Digression of Spirits,” where he talks about devils, demons, fairies, elves, and so forth, and about what hundreds and hundreds of authorities have all said about them and what role they actually play in disease. Here, for example, he is speaking of various books on melancholy of which he doesn’t take a very high view because he doesn’t believe what they say:

Many such stories I find amongst pontifical writers, to prove their assertions; let them free their own credits; some few I will recite in this kind out of most approved Physicians. Cornelius Gemma relates of a young maid, called Katherine Gualter, a cooper’s daughter, in the year 1571, that had such strange passions and convulsions, three men could not sometimes hold her; she purged a live eel, which he saw, a foot and a half long, and touched himself, but the eel afterwards vanished; she vomited some 24 pounds of fulsome stuff of all colours twice a day for 14 days; and after that she voided great balls of hair, pieces of wood, pigeons’ dung, parchment, goose dung, coals; and after them two pounds of pure blood, and then again coals and stones, of which some had inscriptions, bigger than a walnut, some of them pieces of glass, brass, &c., besides paroxysms of laughing, weeping and ecstasies &c. And this (he says), I saw with horror. They could do no good on her by physick, but left her to the Clergy. Marcellus Donatus hath another such story of a country fellow, that had four knives in his belly, indented like a saw, every one a span long, with a wreath of hair like a globe, with much baggage of like sort, wonderful to behold. How it should come into his guts, he concludes, could only have been through the artifice and craft of a d’mon. (II, Memb. I, Subs. 2)

Well, it’s clear that Burton knows that he is describing a case of hysteria, but what he doesn’t know is whether it was the doctor or the patient who had it. We read about sixty pages of this digression about demons and their power and their shape (because some people say that they’re all completely spherical), and we realize that there is probably not an atom of genuine information in the entire passage. It doesn’t follow, of course, that we’ve wasted our time reading it. On the contrary, what it does is recreate for us the incredible seventeenth century. But all of this had started in the sixteenth century with the heavy dose of magic which Paracelsus reintroduced into medicine and the development of the magus figure. The medical man was very frequently a magician whose cures were magical and, consequently, miraculous. In the seventeenth century the magus figure was giving way to what we would think of more as science, but it gave way very slowly, and in Burton’s time almost anything could be true. Magical and scientific explanations could both be given for the same phenomena. Even as late as Sir Isaac Newton, for example, you have a scientist who was just as interested in alchemy and in Biblical numerology as he was in the laws of gravitation and motion.

Burton does not say that literature is a therapy for melancholy, except in a wider context of recreation generally. On the other hand, he begins his book by saying that he wrote the book because he was melancholy himself. In other words, it was a form of auto-therapy that inspired him to write it. The other reason for writing it is that we are: everybody suffers from melancholy. Consequently, the book itself may have a therapeutic value. It’s perhaps worth noting that the longest and most popular section of the book by far is the section on love melancholy, which, of course, coincided with one of the central conventions of the literature at that time. If you wanted to write poetry in Shakespeare’s day, it was practically obligatory to fall in love and to complain about the cruelty and disdain and neglect with which your mistress treated you. The effect of this was to drive you into a state of melancholy, which, again, was partly physical and partly emotional and self-induced.

In later literature, it seems to me that doctors are rather less of a target than lawyers or the clergy, the chief exception being Molière. In Molière’s last play, *La Malade imaginaire*, the central figure is a hypochondriac. He is waited on by two doctors whose names are Purgon and Diafoirus. (*Diafoirus* is the French word for diarrhea.) Their techniques consist almost exclusively of purging and bleeding. Diafoirus has heard of Harvey’s theories of the circulation of the blood, but thinks that that’s just a new fad that will very soon wear out and he’ll then be able to return to his purging and bleeding. The play ends with a magnificent ballet in which a student is admitted to the medical college and is examined by being asked

such questions as “Why does opium put people to sleep?” To which he answers, “Opium puts people to sleep because it has a dormant effect.” Then there is a dance at the end about the routines of purging and clystering and repurging and reclystering and so forth. A little later, in the eighteenth-century novel *Gil Blas*, the hero is apprenticed to a doctor for a time, who carried out these routines of bleeding and purging so thoroughly that his patients invariably died. For this he took the greatest credit to himself, as a compliment to the thoroughness of his methods.

Another aspect of medical theory was that the digesting of food distilled in the stomach what were called “the vegetative spirits,” which were still further distilled and refined into cordial spirits, located in the heart. By a still further distillation, they became the animal spirits—a phrase we still use in a different sense—in the brain or consciousness. This conception or metaphor was of great aid and comfort to Swift in the eighteenth century. It enabled him to explain most of the phenomena of his time of which he disapproved. That is, if the vegetative spirits went up into the brain too suddenly or prematurely, the result was fantasy and illusion. Consequently, you had things like the Nonconformist enthusiasts, of which Swift, who was the dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, took an extremely dim view. The same view of the spirits led Swift to some extraordinarily penetrating psychological observations on the erotic origin of idealism and ambition and various other things. He says, for example, “The very same principle that influences the bully to break the windows of the whore who has jilted him, naturally stirs up a great prince to raise mighty armies, and dream of nothing but sieges, battles, and victories” [*A Tale of a Tub*].

With later writers, like Bernard Shaw in *The Doctor’s Dilemma*, the interest tends to shift to the doctor as the product of a certain kind of society, as a member of a social establishment and under certain kinds of social pressures. But my central point in trying to trace out this intertwining of literary and medical references is that there was a medical tradition unifying body and mind long before modern psychology. The doctors of the nineteenth century, for example, while they may have lacked a good deal of what we would consider scientific training, may have made up for it partly by their close personal relations with their patients and their familiarity with both the physical and the mental constitution of their patients.

This inseparability of body and mind naturally leads to the question of whether such imaginative constructs as literature and the other arts would have a direct role to play in physical health. The art with the longest record in therapy is, of course, music. Even the most inflexible and uptight Puritan could not deny the possible therapeutic power of music because of the story in the Bible of David’s playing a harp in an effort to cure the melancholy of King Saul. Musical theory down to the end of the sixteenth century included a great deal of speculative cosmology, which turned on terms like *harmony* and *rhythm* and assumed a certain correspondence between the balance which made for good health in the body and the balance which kept the world in a state of harmony. Some time ago a book came out called *The Romeo Error*, referring to Romeo’s mistake in thinking that Juliet was dead when she was actually suffering from a drug-induced coma. The point of the book, so far as I gathered, was that a person may be clinically dead for a long time without being actually dead. This is a standard device in many of the romances of the time, especially the late plays of Shakespeare. In *Pericles*, for example, the hero, Pericles, goes to sea with his wife, Thaisa. His wife dies. The sailors insist on putting her in a coffin and throwing the coffin overboard, on the grounds that it’s bad luck to a ship to have a corpse in it. So her coffin is thrown overboard, but, being made of wood, it drifts to shore. It’s picked up there, and her body is brought to the doctor, who says,

*’Tis known, I ever
Have studied physic, through which secret art,
By turning o’er authorities, I have,
Together with my practice, made familiar
To me and to my aid the blest infusions
That dwells in vegetives, in metals, stones.*

And one of his attendants says, “Your honour has though Ephesus pour’d forth / Your charity, and hundreds call themselves / Your creatures, who by you have been restor’d.” That is, he can bring people back to life again. We’re still, of course, within the orbit of the magus, who works in terms of the mysterious virtues of herbs and so on. But my reason for referring to this passage is that what the doctor is most anxious about is getting the music started. He has a kind of private orchestra as a part of his practice. He starts the music going, which is obviously the initiating power in bringing Thaisa back to life. One occasionally sees, even in contemporary newspapers, the suggestion that in thinking of the turmoils of Eastern Europe today one should not overlook the direct influence of American jazz and rock. In any case, there’s always a certain amount of mystery about music. We never know quite what’s going on in it. Perhaps it’s partly to that that it owes its therapeutic reputation.

Literature has never had the prestige of music in that context, partly because, I think, literature is not really defined clearly as a category until about the Romantic period—though, of course, people spoke of the poets. Literary criticism goes back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which is apparently a set of incomplete lecture notes. At least, what has come down to us is incomplete. Aristotle deals mainly with tragedy. He begins with a definition of tragedy in which he says that it is a form that is complete and of a certain magnitude, varied by different poetic devices, and raising the emotions of pity and fear in order to affect a catharsis of those emotions. Now that is undoubtedly the most celebrated sentence that has ever been written in the history of literary criticism. One wonders why it turns on the word *catharsis*, which is a medical metaphor. The question naturally arises, Would it apply to other genres besides tragedy, such as comedy?

There must be at least fifty theories on the market about the meaning of *catharsis*. I can perhaps save time by giving you the correct one, which by coincidence happens to be mine. I think that by “pity and fear” is meant the moral feelings that draw you either toward or away from certain characters. In such a play as *Othello*, for example, we feel pity for Desdemona, because she is so utterly innocent, and we feel terror for Iago, because he is so unrelieved a villain. But the central figure of the play is Othello, and our feelings about him are very much mixed. If we are watching something in which these emotions of pity and terror predominate, if they are the leading features that we react to, we have something that is usually today called melodrama, rather than tragedy. Melodrama impels us, of course, to hiss villains and applaud heroes. But if these emotions of sympathy and repulsion—pity and terror—are purged through catharsis, as they are in tragedy, then the response to tragedy is a response of emotional balance, a kind of self-integrating process. That is, what we feel when we respond to a tragic action is, well, yes, this kind of thing does happen: it inevitably happens given these circumstances. With Othello, who’s the central figure, it doesn’t really matter whether he is a good man or a bad man. He is obviously a mixture of both, or at least a mixture of strength and weakness. In any case, the particular thing called tragedy that happens to a tragic hero does not depend on his moral status. The hero of tragedy may be a very good person or a very bad one. But tragedy itself is the working out of an inevitability which the audience recognizes to be such. There is, according to Aristotle, a kind of excessive action on the part of the tragic hero, which Aristotle calls *hybris*. That is bound to lead to the restoring of balance in the natural order—what he calls *nemesis*. So the action of tragedy is almost physically intelligible, almost as intelligible in terms of a cosmos and the workings of nature as it is in moral or human terms.

Irony is an important genre for us because so much contemporary literature is ironic in its tone. What irony appeals to is a sense of normality on the part of the audience. That is, we recognize a certain action to be grotesque or absurd or evil or futile or whatever, and it is that sense of normality in the audience that enables irony to make its point as irony. Without that sense of the normal, irony would cease to become ironic and become simply a description. That is the trouble that so many writers complain of—that the world itself is so much more ironic a place than any kind of ironic construction they themselves could dream up. In a way, their work has all been done for them.

The appeals and responses of audiences in the tragic and ironic modes have a great deal to do with confrontation. The sense of confrontation is something which writers themselves use within their own fictions, partly to demonstrate how very effective it is. There is a story by the German Romantic writer E.

T. A. Hoffmann, for example, about the painter Salvator Rosa, who walks into a situation of a very familiar comic type. There is a young heroine languishing under an old and miserly uncle, who is determined to marry her, and there is a perfectly acceptable hero who wants her instead. The painter gets the old miser out to a theatrical performance in which he acts the part of the miser himself on the stage. This shatters the miser so completely that he loses his miserliness and becomes immediately converted, and the heroine is able to marry the hero. A rather more familiar example would be Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, where we realize that the story is, to put it mildly, somewhat improbable. Its preposterous sexism, of course, was never taken very seriously even in its own day. Nevertheless, it is tremendously good drama, and it is that partly because it deals with such an admirable dramatic device. Petruchio confronts Katherina with a shrew—with the mirror reflection of her own shrewishness—and so shows her exactly what it looks like when she can see it objectively. It is her recognition of that that casts her shrewishness out of her and converts her. The point is that by putting on a certain dramatic act Petruchio has also performed an act of therapy.

There is also the question of *catharsis* in comedy. Aristotle either didn't write a treatise on comedy or we've lost it if he did. In any case, we have to go a little further from Aristotle to discuss comedy. In Greek mythology, there is the earth goddess Demeter who lost her daughter Persephone and went mourning all over the world in search of her. She was in a practically catatonic state. She just sat and stared gloomily in front of her until a servant girl named Iambe made some obscene remarks and an old nurse named Baubo performed an obscene dance, which eventually persuaded her to smile. There is a very similar story, curiously enough, in Japanese mythology. When we look at the earliest of comic writers, Aristophanes, we find that his text is rather startlingly obscene, even for these enlightened days. One wonders how it would have been tolerated in his time—in a culture in which drama, including comic drama, had something of a sacerdotal and ritual side to it. It is obvious that the obscenity is important as a form of psychological release. That kind of release helps to build up the festive atmosphere of comedy, which had at that time a very close connection with certain festival periods of the year.

The Czech writer Milan Kundera has made a very profound remark about comedy. He says that the great comic geniuses are not the ones that keep us laughing, because laughter is simply a reflex: you can laugh for a whole evening and still be bored out of your mind. The great comic geniuses, Kundera says, are those who have discovered or uncovered for their audiences the comic aspects of what those audiences have not previously thought of as comic. If you apply a statement like that to the novels of Dickens, for example, you can see how profoundly true that is. There are many aspects of Victorian civilization which seem so humorless and grim. If you take a look at Engels' *Condition of the Working Class*, you can see how grim the conditions sometimes were. But the comic side of them emerges in Dickens. There is little doubt, I think, in the therapeutic importance of Dickens in his impact on Victorian society. The same thing is true of such figures as Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton. Chaplin is an almost unbearably pathetic figure, with his mixture of the dapper and the seedy in his appearance and of the timid and the jaunty in his manner. He seems to dramatize everything that is crushed and neglected and treated with contempt in the world, and yet he uncovers the whole comic side of that, which, again, restores a balance, in those who watch him, of something that has been repressed. So, of course, is the sick joke, which brings us back very close to Aristotle's *catharsis*, because the sick joke expresses forms of pity and fear which achieve something of a purgation of those emotions. It is very familiar how a certain type of sardonic joke arises among oppressed people or people living under totalitarian governments. Such rather subversive humor clearly has a survival value for such people. That is true of the oppressed. It is true also of the other end of the society. One thinks of the role of the fool in *King Lear*, whose function is to tell Lear the exact truth about himself. This makes what he says funny because nothing is funnier than the sudden escape of the exact truth of any situation. That is why Renaissance princes kept fools around them—to remind them of the more human aspects of their own situation and to set out for them a feeling of proportion and balance, which, again, seems to have a great deal to do with both mental and physical health.

I am suggesting that in all this we are really coming back to Galen's principle of magical sympathies and antipathies, except that they are not regarded any longer as forces existing in nature itself. That is, we don't believe in cures by sympathetic magic any more, and we don't, so far as I know, prescribe saffron as a cure for jaundice simply because it is yellow. And so far as I know, Alcoholics Anonymous does not recommend the wearing of amethysts because, being wine-colored, they will keep you sober. The word *amethyst*, in fact, is Greek for "not drunk." The magical sympathies and antipathies that exist now, I think, are rather those that exist between words or pictures and the social environment. That is, literature and painting, particularly, constitute a kind of counter-environment in which the follies and evils of the environment are partly reflected in the arts but within a context which, again, achieves that type of purgation and, ultimately, of balance which Aristotle is talking about. Such a use of words is rather indirect for many poets, and there is the strong temptation by many writers to become ideologues, to use the same kind of language that political people do, and, to some extent, to turn their backs on their own specific assignment.

Poetic language is very different from rhetorical or ideological language. Rhetorical language appeals to an audience to integrate as a unit and to do certain things or avoid certain other things. Poetic language tends rather to turn its back on the listener and set up something which requires the reader to detach himself. It is the language of rhetoric and the language of ideology that are the spark plugs of history. I have lived through seventy-seven years of the history of this century myself, and the number of changes which have taken place in that three-quarters of a century is, of course, immense. But it has left me with the general feeling that history is a kind of dissolving phantasmagoria, and that all ideologies are sooner or later illusory. To the question of social change there seem to me to be prior questions, such as, Has anything improved in the course of that time? Has anything remained stable? My own view, which my life continually confirms, is that nothing has improved in the twentieth century except science and that nothing has remained stable except the arts.

In the art of literature, particularly, I've never found any better place to start from than the observation of Duke Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where he says in the last act of the play that "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact." By imagination, Theseus means essentially seeing things that are not there. Lunatics and lovers and poets have a family likeness in that regard. The kernel of truth in Theseus' remark is that in the arts reality and realism are rather different things. Realism is a perfectly legitimate form of literature, but it only takes you so far. Ultimate reality, which includes fantasy and romance and great many other things as well, is something which is verbal. The structural principles of literature are myth and metaphor, and both of these violate the rules of common sense and logic. A myth, by which I mean the Greek word *mythos*—plot or narrative—is a story which in literature says explicitly, "This is what is happening," and implicitly, "This is what is not happening at all." You have to swallow both statements before you can read a novel. A metaphor says, "This *is* that," or, if you look at Jacob's prophecy in the Book of Genesis, "Joseph is a fruitful bough," "Naphthali is a hind let loose," "Issacar is a strong ass," and so forth. The metaphor similarly conveys the explicit statement, "A *is* B", and also implicitly the statement, "Nobody but a fool would really imagine that A was B."

That is partly what I mean by saying that the arts form a kind of counter-environment, setting something up which is really antipathetic to the civilization in which it exists. I said that reality is a much more inclusive term in literature than realism is. It seems to me that at a certain point of intensity what literature conveys is the sense of a controlled hallucination. That is, in literature things are not really seen until they become not actual hallucinations, because that would merely substitute a subjective experience for an objective one, but a controlled hallucination, where things are seen with a kind of intensity with which they are not seen in ordinary experience.

I remember my mother telling me of undergoing a very serious illness after the birth of my sister, and in the course of the illness she became delirious. Her father, who was a Methodist clergyman, came along with the twenty-five volumes of Scott's Waverley novels and dropped them on her. By the time she had read her way through them she was all right again. What impressed me about that was her own

conviction that the Scott novels were in fact the curative agent. While I suppose any kind of new and absorbing interest might have been equally beneficial, still I've read most of those novels myself, and would not be at all surprised if the plots of Scott's novels did not form a kind of counter-delirium which had to do with her own recovery.

Certainly one can find in the whole therapeutic area of the arts many ways that the best words in the best order, which is somebody's definition of poetry, can act in a physical way. Many years ago, when I found myself teaching Milton's *Paradise Lost* with considerable intensity, I discovered that his tremendous lines tended to detach themselves from their context and become individual beings chasing themselves around inside my head. On one occasion when I was very tired and still couldn't get to sleep, I examined the contents of my brain, so far as I could, and I found there the line from Book X describing the building of the bridge over Chaos to Hell: "Disparted Chaos overbuilt exclaimed." I thought to myself, well, nobody can sleep with a line like that chewing away in the back of his skull, so I concentrated on the line about the planets from Book VIII, "With inoffensive pace that spinning sleeps," and was asleep in no time.

I am not suggesting, or at least not yet suggesting, that literature ought to be read under medical supervision. What I am suggesting is that we should not overlook the immense recuperative power that literature, along with the other arts, could provide in a world as crazy as ours. Poets themselves often do not realize their own potentiality in this regard. I think film-makers, of all the producers of art, have perhaps the clearest and most consistent notion of it. But in an age when there is such a vogue for forms of meditation and psychosynthesis and the like, it is just barely possible that literature might be what all the great poets have invariably said that it was, that is, a means of concentrating and intensifying the mind and of bringing it into a state of energy, which is the basis of all health.

Of Janus, Job and "J": A Review of *Words with Power*

Craig Stewart Walker

On more than one occasion Northrop Frye observed that whenever we read we find our attention moving in two directions at once: that is, centripetally to comprehend the internal unity of a work, and centrifugally to relate what we are reading to the world outside. This Janus-like reading experience is the principle lying behind Frye's apportionment of his discussion of the Bible between *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*. Where *The Great Code* was more concerned with demonstrating the coherence to be found among the apparently sprawling "little books" (ta biblia), *Words with Power* examines the patterns or, to use a word with greater currency in criticism these days, the resonance which these Biblical myths share with literature and other imaginative shapings of human experience. Yet this is not necessarily the relationship between the two works which a reader of *The Great Code* might have envisioned at the end of that book. In the Introduction to *Words with Power* Frye tells the reader that this is not the sequel he originally had intended to write. He easily might have followed the structure of his lectures from "The Mythological Framework of Western Culture," the course he developed over a fifty-year period at the University of Toronto and which formed the basis for much in these two books. Simply described, Frye had split the material into two parts, the first moving systematically through Biblical patterns of imagery and the second following the general narrative structure of the Bible. In *The Great Code*, however, he was already moving beyond the considerable scope of that course to expound a largely Viconian theory of language and integrate his study of the Bible with a number of literary and cultural theories touched on in his earlier work. This gave the book an awesome profundity, but must have also made it a very tough to follow. There was evidently no shortage of material left for inclusion in the second work, but these theories belong to a coherent overview and are difficult to grasp unless they are explicated within a unified structure. Since *The Great Code* had broken away from the two-part structure of the course, the second

book was left with no obvious solution to the problem of unity. So, instead of simply taking up where *The Great Code* left off, as we had been led to expect, *Words with Power* re-covers a good deal of the same ground, albeit from a different perspective. If I may be forgiven a mixed metaphor, it would be approximately correct to think of these two works as a pair of concentric grooves along which the outward/inward Janus heads move in tandem. This is true to the point that one could easily read the second book before the first without being very much the worse for it. Certainly the specific references to *The Great Code* which Frye included in *Words with Power* suggest that the order of composition is the preferable reading order, but there are equally good arguments—in particular, the comparative difficulty of the books (the later work, I think, would be slightly more congenial to the lay reader)—for moving backwards. As it turns out this is a fortunate state of affairs, for it seems probable that a good many people will be encouraged by the publicity surrounding Frye's recent death to read something of his work for the first time; and since *Words with Power* has been sitting on the best-seller list for several weeks recently it is also likely that it will be this book with which many people start. That thought raises the questions of how typical *Words with Power* is of Frye's work as a whole and inevitably, now that Frye is no longer with us, of the appropriateness of this book as the work which more or less closes his canon.

More than forty years ago, in *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye summarized a series of observations with a remark which is probably as profound and nearly as pithy as Albert Einstein's mass-energy equation: "the Word of God is the aggregate of works of inspired art" (108). The identification of matter with energy is in itself startling, but only when the implications of Einstein's observation began to emerge was it widely realized that this simple equation demanded a fundamental alteration of our consciousness. Similarly, Frye's simple remark acquires more and more significance as its full context is gradually established. Indeed, much of what he has written since then could easily be read as a sort of extended commentary on his original equation; and it would not be far from the mark to say that this commentary finds its apotheosis—literally—in *Words with Power*. If those statements sound extravagant, let me first explain that the analogy between Einstein's equation and Frye's was not as frivolously chosen as it may have seemed. In fact, Frye himself suggests the comparison in *Words with Power* when he tells us: "matter is energy congealed to the point at which we can live with it. In the spiritual vision we recover the sense of energy to the extent that we identify with the creating power" (187). The reader may also hear an echo here of Percy Bysshe Shelley's claim in *Defence of Poetry* that "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man." There is an important link between Shelley and Frye in that both identify divine power with the imagination. Furthermore they both suggest that this divine or spiritual element is made manifest in literature without regard to its religious status (i. e. secular or liturgical).

To be sure, such a view has not been limited to these two writers. Aside from Frye's books, probably the most notable recent work based on this premise has been written by Harold Bloom. In *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (1989) Bloom insisted that there is continuity in the nature of literary inspiration between sacred and non-sacred texts. He developed this view further in a more recent work, which has shared the best-seller lists with *Words with Power* as a sort of companion Bible book: the highly entertaining and controversial *The Book of J* (1990). There Bloom writes: "I do not believe that the Torah is any more or less the revealed Word of God than are Dante's *Commedia*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, or Tolstoy's novels, all works of comparable literary sublimity" (11). *The Book of J* aggressively demonstrates this theory by excavating an alleged Biblical author, "J," and treating her [sic] to the same sort of psycho-literary analysis which Bloom has become famous for offering the major English poets.

From a virtually identical premise, Frye has written a very different book indeed, and the differences between the books reflect the widely divergent concerns of these two critics. Bloom's critical interests center on the psychology of the writer, who is seen as a sort of Promethean spirit struggling to create in the face of massive repressive forces. It would be unfair to say that Bloom "pulls the Bible down to the same level as other literary texts," because that suggests a mean-spirited sneering that is far from his tone or intent. Nevertheless, Bloom's approach must be acknowledged to be reductive as compared to that of Frye, who is not nearly so interested in the personal origins of the Bible's literary elements as he is

with their destination, that is to say, in the integration of these elements within the entire structure of literary experience.

Throughout his career Frye argued that “literature is not just an aggregate of texts, but a total structure articulating a total vision of reality.” Set that statement beside his equation of art with the Word of God, and Frye appears to be asserting that this “total vision” is the vision of God. Accordingly, analogy may be drawn with yet another writer’s work: Frye’s description of the imaginative cosmos is comparable to the immaterialist philosophy of George Berkeley, wherein “*esse is percipi*,” but individual human perceptions are said to partake of the universal perception belonging to God. The key point here is that in attributing the imaginative vision to the ultimate authority, Frye has made a claim for the authority of the individual works, but only insofar as they are understood to be the constituents of a total structure. The question of authority brings us closer to the topic at hand. Frye derived the title *Words with Power* from a reference to Jesus at Luke 4:32 which the Authorized Version translates as: “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.” On the other hand, the Revised Standard Version reads: “And they were astonished at his teaching, for his word was with authority.” Frye often admitted his general preference for the AV, and of course the phrase “words with authority” clunks dully on the ear compared to Frye’s title; but the AV’s choice of the word “power” has another advantage in that it effectively opens a dialectic by begging the question of the sort of power being invoked here. Early in the book Frye obliquely answers the question by contrasting the phrase with Chairman Mao’s assertion that the only power worth having comes out of the end of a gun (45). Near the end he expounds his answer: “Divine power can act only in its own context of wisdom and love: in the midst of human folly its operations would have to be entirely inscrutable. Power outside that context operates only in hell” (308). The reason Frye takes so long to answer this tacit question is given in *The Great Code*: “To answer a question . . . is to consolidate the mental level on which the question is asked” (xv). Instead then, Frye sets about establishing a context which will take the questioner to a higher mental level for, as he argued in the previously quoted passage, it is this context itself which bestows power—or authority, as the RSV would have it.

This is all rather tautological, of course: Jesus’s words are powerful because they belong to the context of which the Bible is exemplary. Readers of *The Great Code* will remember that there Frye made much of the tautologies of the Christian Bible under the rubric Typology. Symbols to be found in one part of the Bible echo or are echoed by symbols in another; so, for example, baptism is an antitype of which Noah’s flood is the type. The authors of the New Testament find authority for particular events by looking back to the Old for presages, and they reveal the true meaning of events in the Old Testament by pointing to echoes in the life of Christ. Essentially, *Words with Power* expands this pattern to show how subsequent Western literature continues to build on the authority of the Biblical context. In effect, this is an elaboration of the theory of “displacement” which Frye introduced in *Anatomy of Criticism*. There he explained that literary structure relies on archetypes which can be seen in their simplest form as pure myths expressing fundamental human concerns, our most basic desires and anxieties, but that literature adapts or “displaces” these myths to serve interests of plausibility or morality. *Words with Power* establishes a perspective from which this shared identity of literature and myth can be seen clearly. Frye compares his view of the Bible to the purloined letter of Poe’s story: this perspective has always been staring us in the face, but we seem to have been unable to ask ourselves the right questions, to think in the manner necessary to see what lay before us. It is no accident that the Book of Job looms so large in both *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*. That particular story has been beset with a more than usual amount of explication, and yet has remained probably the most ideologically problematic of Biblical texts. “Just put up and shut up, like a good minion” is what the most prevalent reading amounts to. Yet it is Frye’s contention that a thorough acquaintance with the Bible is essentially liberating; and indeed, emancipation is the principle theme of both the Old and New Testament, as of Passover and Easter, although naturally the point is differently emphasized.

Frye asks us to pull aside the veil of dogmatism which shrouds the Bible so that we may read it with fresh eyes, for its appeal to the imagination. This is also Harold Bloom’s exhortation. However, Frye

moves on to ask us to reach through our imagination toward the vision of God—that is both to see God and to see with God-like eyes. At first blush, this may sound like *hubris*: indeed, for the mind which understands Job’s vision of God to have simply taught him “Don’t git above yer raisin!” it is undoubtedly exactly that. But Frye’s view has more to do with following St. Paul’s instruction to read the Bible spiritually and with the inadequacy of quotidian thought to meet the Word of God. We therefore find Frye “revolving around the Book of Job like a satellite” (310) because this is the central myth of which his own book is a “displacement.” Job’s trial belongs to the type “which is a testing and refining operation, and which is directed toward what one can still be” (310-11). Instead of consolidating Job’s mental level, God points out the inadequacy of his questions and demonstrates that understanding comes not directly, but by placing one’s concerns in a larger context and so allowing the deeper apprehension and power available through the imagination—through faith. Janus is the Roman god of thresholds and beginnings, and so not an entirely inappropriate figure to preside over *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*, for this new way of thinking is, after all, a sort of spiritual rebirth. The problem with so many of the exhortations to be “born again” which one hears from various sources is that this process of rebirth is actually a sort of acceptance of death: the prospective convert is being asked to give up the active responsibility of liberal critical thought for the passive, doctrinaire view of life and morality espoused by some particular institution. Frye’s argument stands in exact contradiction to that process, for *Words with Power*, together with *The Great Code*, invites us to live “vertically,” so to speak, to restore to our minds the imaginative context inherent to the Bible and developed through Western literature. The ideological displacements of these myths become less threatening, less limiting when one can apprehend their significance within the larger context, when our perspective of reality comprises the view from far above and far below, when we approach the vision to which Job was led by God.

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In Memory of Northrop Frye

Perhaps back to the hinterlands, to the clear cold springs
that reflect everything but his image, from which rivers rise.
Perhaps to the slopes of mountains, to which he could say
with complete assurance: ‘Remove hence to yonder place . . . ?’
Perhaps to the swept meadows of perfect minuscule flowers
and thousand-year-old shrubs. Not to the barren peaks.

He was known along the coast where, as he would have insisted,
he was only ‘. . . finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell’;
and at the deltas of tawny rivers where dug-outs are clustered
he could be found in familiar discourse with the natives,
who trusted him. He would not be revered. And spent long hours
scrutinizing the great ocean all undiscovered before him.

When he departed, he left behind him elaborate maps of *Terra
Incognita*; the rudiments of a grammar; a code broken open;
a *Sailing Instructions* for mariners that, if many will perish
in the destructive element immersed, some lives may be saved.
These survive him, his graceful anatomies. He was much loved.

We could mourn him. But that would be boasting.

—Richard Outram

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