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The Ruins of Time: Frye and the City, 1977

Michael Dolzani

[This paper was presented at annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in Toronto, December 1996. Michael Dolzani teaches at Baldwin Wallace College.]

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
“O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.”
—W.H.Auden, “As I walked
out one evening”

The ruins of time build mansions in eternity.

—William Blake, letter to William Hayley, May 6, 1800

This is the story of Northrop Frye’s last great “mental fight ‘to “build Jerusalem” in the face of the transience of all things in time. In 1977, Frye turned sixty-five, not only the traditional age of retirement but an age at which all the clocks of the city begin to whisper that the productions of time are only such things as dreams are made on; eventually, they vanish, and leave not a rack behind. In his work on the Bible, Frye speaks of an “anxiety of continuity” in society; at one point in his notebooks, he says that the anxiety of continuity masks an even deeper fear of metamorphosis (Notebook 24, par. 249). In the opening of *The Double Vision*, he repeats, using the fall of Communism as his occasion, what he had often said before: that the longer one lives, and the more history one sees, the more one realizes that the “real world” of hard facts and immutable realities is in fact a ghostly phantasmagoria.

At sixty-five, there was mounting evidence for that in his own life. Since 1957, the city of Toronto, in which he had lived all his adult life, had exploded outward in all directions; yet its astonishing growth—anything but ruins—at the same time obliterated the more intimate community that Frye had known. A man who had never to drive, partly because he was able to walk to work if he had to, now lived in a Spenglerian megalopolis whose rush hour traffic jams began at 3:30 and lasted until 7:00. The steroids of North American capitalism had also swelled the dimensions of the University of Toronto in the city’s center, but again at the cost of making it more impersonal. Worse, the demise at the beginning of the decade of Victoria’s Honour Course, which Frye regarded as providing the best undergraduate liberal arts training in North America, had already sounded a warning that the type of education Frye believed in was under attack and in retreat in all quarters.

When Frye delivered the 1977 MLA Presidential Address, his own work was widely considered obsolete, and the critical profession was in what we might now think of as the Bosnian phase of the “theory wars,” in the course of which, at least in his view, criticism had become a Babel of many mansions. Not only was his “ogdoad scheme,” an enormous project of eight interpenetrating books setting forth the total pattern of symbolism in the arts, religion, philosophy, and history, looking highly unlikely, but even the so-called Third Book, the successor to *Fearful Symmetry* and the *Anatomy of Criticism*, which was to be only one volume of that eight, had proved impossible to write and would have to be abandoned in the form in which Frye contemplated it as late as a Work in Progress memo of 1972. Worst of all, his wife Helen, the most vivacious woman in the city of Toronto, was soon to begin, or was perhaps already beginning, her tragic decline into Alzheimer’s. The years he had yet to live were roughly equivalent to the duration of Prospero’s exile in *The Tempest*.

Of course I am being selective, and could just as easily have cited positive aspects of Frye’s situation in 1977. My bias is designed to highlight a difficult question that was both a scholarly and personal preoccupation of Frye’s in the final part of his life. Simply put, it is the question of loss. Both of Frye’s last full-length books, *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*, include important meditations on the Book of Job. Facing our own death is one thing, but the Book of Job suggests that that may be easier than living on in the face of the progressive annihilation in time of everything we have loved. *The Great Code*, working off of Aristotle’s definition of property as what is proper to a person, argues that the trials of Job are an experiment set up to answer the question: how much can you take away from what a man has before you start taking away from what he is?” (195). The approach evokes Frye’s treatment elsewhere of King Lear. Lear is not a righteous man like Job, but even in the legalistic morality of Job’s friends, nothing he has done could remotely “deserve” what he has to suffer, and his trials, like Job’s, take the form of a progressive stripping away of everything he possesses. The ultimate loss is identical in each case: Lear loses a beloved daughter, and Job loses three. Now, Frye had no children, and anyway a comparison of Northrop Frye with Lear and Job risks looking extremely silly, even if he himself wondered in the notebooks about the psychosomatic symbolism of the eczema-like skin cancer he eventually contracted, but I don’t think it is silly to declare that a major theme in Frye, early and late, is loss and restoration, and particularly lost and restored love. This is, after all, the plot of comedy and romance, the narrative forms that he openly declared his greatest affection for.

The theme I am examining has imposed itself partly because of my current task of editing the original notebooks for the Third Book, a project based on four quadrants—Eros, Adonis, Hermes, and Prometheus—of a mythical cycle whose diagram Frye whimsically dubbed the Great Doodle. These notebooks begin around 1964 and form a sequence until the mid-1970s, at which point a major reorganization began that resulted in *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*. In the second half of *Words with Power*, Eros, Adonis, Hermes, and Prometheus still exist, but as ascents and descents along a vertical *axis mundi* rather than as

way stations of a circular quest of the hero. In other words, Frye abandoned a diagram that had organized his thinking for at least four decades: Notebook 18 contains an early version of the Great Doodle and its quadrants that may go back to as early as 1948. There must have been powerful reasons for the change, at such a late date, of a pattern that had been meditated for so long, and one of them may have been the challenge of the question of the happy ending.

That is, the Great Doodle is a diagram of the fulfilled quest, and such fulfillment is represented as a happy ending on several possible levels: individuals who find or expand their identity, couples who hook up successfully, families and societies reintegrated and renewed. The circular form denotes that the fulfillment is not just an achievement but a restoration, often on a higher level but still a restoration, of what has been lost since the beginning. Yet this simply does not happen in normal experience; in life, some losses may be restored or made up for, but the deepest losses are also the most irrevocable. In both life and literature, the central loss of this irrevocable and inconsolable kind is the death of love. The actual death of the other, as with the daughters of Job and Lear, is but one form among several: the other may be unattainable through circumstances; may not love us in return; may even be renounced out of a self-sacrificing loyalty to some overriding principle, as Kierkegaard broke with Regina Olsen. But whatever the case, the last word on at least some anguishing losses is Lear's terrible cry: "Thou'lt come no more, / Never, never, never, never!" (5.3.313–14)

In literature, tragedy copes with annihilating loss by a cathartic re-enactment, but what of comedy and romance? Are they really no more than grown-up versions of the "Fort-Da" game in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, by which a small child deals with separation anxiety through hiding a spool symbolizing his absent mother, then triumphantly pulling it into view again with a string? So long as Frye kept his discussion of these issues within the context of literature, he could maintain the serene and witty detachment he displays in *A Natural Perspective*, for literature has only a "hypothetical" relation to external reality. But the Third Book was supposed to move beyond the formal concerns of the *Anatomy*: its subject was the relation of literature (including myth) to experience. When literature does attempt to push against what is after all one of the primary limits of the human condition, it quickly acquires overtones not just of the mythical but of what Frye calls the kerygmatic, the rhetoric of anagogic vision that characterizes scripture. Still, insofar as it maintains plausibility at all, literary plots tend to deal with restoration by displacement: what looked like final annihilation is reduced to merely an ordeal of absence. Thus, Odysseus "miraculously" turns up in Ithaca after twenty years; Hermione in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* never really died but is only disguised as a statue, which "comes to life again" after sixteen years; Frances Phelan in William Kennedy's *Iron-weed*, with echoes of both the *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, is reunited with his wife after twenty-two years as a wandering, drunken bum. However, in the world of experience, people are not just misplaced but truly

die, or are permanently lost or alienated from us in other ways, with no possible restoration on the same plane of experience.

Many people, including some great poets, have questioned the wisdom of trying to push beyond this limit. Transience and loss are in the natural order of things, they say, and there is nothing beyond the natural order; attempts at transcendence involve us either in dependence upon a wish-fulfillment parental figure in the sky or a Faustian egotism that tries to make itself superhuman and ends by making itself, as Blake said, less than human. What we should cultivate is the sane balance and acceptance of, say, a Montaigne. In fact, it may be that in what Christopher Lasch has called the culture of narcissism this is an increasingly favored stance; but Lasch also said that the price we pay for such risk reduction is the “minimal self”: a renunciation of desire as too dangerous or consuming, and a determination to keep all commitments, whether to people or to any sort of higher ideal, carefully limited and therefore safe. This may be an unromantic response, with either a small or a capital “r.” But it is a rational one, or seems so to one who has actually had to live through a great grief. In his 1987 sermon “To Come to Light,” dedicated to Helen Kemp Frye, who had just died in the previous year, Frye said, “In moments of despair or bereavement or horror, we find ourselves staring blankly into an unresponding emptiness, utterly frustrated by its indifference. We come from the unknown at birth, and we rejoin it at death with all our questions about it unanswered” (*No Uncertain Sounds* 34).

As the example of Dante has already implied, the answer of orthodox religion is recompense in a supernatural realm beyond death. Job’s restoration within life has always been a terrible problem for interpreters, striking many of them like a Hollywood ending tacked on to an otherwise serious film. The most frequent recourse, by Christians at least, has been to read it as a type of the final restoration of a “new heaven, new earth” spoken of in the Book of Revelation, in which God says, “Behold, I make all things new.” In *Repetition*, a book which greatly interested Frye, Kierkegaard’s fictional stand-in for himself, after breaking his engagement and living in complete isolation in another city, becomes fascinated by the Book of Job, in which he sees a parallel to his own loss and a hope for something beyond his own despair. Yet the problem, as Kierkegaard and everyone else realizes, is evidence. “Show me,” as Ellie Arroway says in the film of Carl Sagan’s *Contact*. All the evidence we see is the ruins of time.

What has most struck me in editing the Third Book notebooks, with their four quadrants corresponding to Chapters 4-8 respectively of the later *Words with Power*, is how overwhelmingly the Third Book began as first and foremost a book of Eros—to the extent that Frye worries about the thinness of the material he has for the other quadrants. The central theme of Eros, he says, is the reversal of the current of time; as he climbs the seven-story mountain towards the restoration of Paradise and the reunion with the dead and lost beloved, the pilgrim decreases the ravages of time. Twenty years later, in the notebooks for *Words with Power*, Frye explicitly says that Helen has become his Beatrice (Notebook 44, pars. 203, 223), and also observes that the final order of chapters, HEAP, Hermes, Eros,

Adonis, Prometheus, is the order of those great modern poems of time's dis-possession, the Eliot Quartets (Notebook 50, par. 186). But the purgatorial ascent has been removed from the mountain of love to the caverns of the grave: in Chapter 8, Frye returns to an older tradition than Dante's, in which Purgatory, according to Jacques LeGoff's *The Birth of Purgatory*, was located beneath the earth and associated with fire" (chap. 5). The descent to this Promethean underworld is the deepest of all possible descents, beneath orthodox hells of infernal punishment, beneath the rag and bone shop of the heart, beneath even death and the grave, down to the point that on the Great Doodle had been called the *point of demonic epiphany*, the point of *nothing*, the central concept of the chapter. What kind of creation is possible *ex nihilo*? "Nothing will come of nothing," says King Lear, "Speak again" (1.1.90)

What happens is that the point of total loss itself undergoes metamorphosis, *but in the reverse, direction*, a Jungian *enantiodromia*, Biblical *metanoia*, Eastern paravritti, Blakean vortex, God rising from the whirlwind in Job. The vehicle of this reversal is what Frye calls *ecstatic metaphor*, metaphor taken not hypothetically but literally and experientially, a restoring power that identifies the subject with all his lost objects. In "The Dialectic of Belief and Vision," Frye writes, "no one can read far in, for example, mystical literature without feeling the urgency of the question of whether there is an identity of the kind that the verbal metaphor suggests but does not assert. In fact some sense of ultimate identity, of the kind implicit in the Hindu formula 'thou art that' seems to lie behind nearly all the profoundest religious feelings and experiences, whatever the actual religion, even when the ideological censor forbids its expression as a doctrine" (*Myth and Metaphor* 106). What kind of reality can this spiritual restoration possibly have? Unfortunately, it is impossible for discursive language to answer that question without breaking down into a series of paradoxes, since the experience lies beyond the level of subject-object perception. On that level, as Frye says in a passage that became the basis for Jay Macpherson's wonderful poem "The Beauty of Job's Daughters," if we saw Job in his restoration, all we would see was a miserable old man scraping his boils. But that old man "has seen something that we have not seen, and knows something that we do not know" (*The Great Code* 197).

How to validate this, though, for those of us who are not mystics? There is no way except for all of us to become mystics, that is, imaginative visionaries. That is why much of Chapter 8 of *Words with Power* is taken up with education, in the widest sense that includes the disciplines of both artistic and scientific-technological creativity. These can be what Abraham Maslow might have called compensatory yogas for those who lack the enabling grace of peak experiences, creative techniques based on the premise that reality is *nothing* in itself, but has to be brought into being by a creative effort.

But the problem of belief still remains, for Frye concedes in "Dialectic" that it is not possible to believe, either in terms of intellectual assent to evidence or of emotional conviction, in something that is not an object of belief, because it is simply not an object at all. Yet faith, Frye says, is not merely a special kind of belief—a kind that persists without or even despite the evidence. Faith is what our actions show that we have committed ourselves

to, out of love; it thus rises out of deep, sometimes unconscious depths of personality, and may directly contradict our consciously held beliefs—or disbeliefs. Frye often refers to Socrates' remark in Plato's *Republic* that the real Republic is in the wise man's mind, and the wise man will thus live in it no matter what state he is living in externally. Likewise the knights of faith show by their actions that they are living in a universe of love, sometimes even in the midst of a skeptical disbelief so strong it amounts to despair, for no better reason than that that is the only universe worth being alive in. In "The Innocent Fox," Loren Eiseley recounts a moment spent playing with a fox cub too young to realize it should fear a human presence. For that one moment, the whole Darwinian universe of fear and survival of the fittest fell away, and man and fox, taking turns shaking a bone in their teeth, were living in a redeemed and loving paradisaical nature. "It is the gravest, most meaningful act I shall ever accomplish," Eiseley remarks, "but, as Thoreau once remarked of some peculiar errand of his own, there is no use reporting it to the Royal Society" (*The Unexpected Universe* 212).

Or perhaps to the MLA. And yet perhaps there is some use in reporting it after all. At the end of his 1977 Presidential Address, Frye suggests that what the humanities need in a time of crisis is a sense of common identity, "an identity produced by the authority of the word speaking for itself. The awareness of this identity may be unconscious, but then some critics have suggested that the unconscious itself is linguistically structured. If the awareness ever rose directly into our consciousness, as a full vision of the role of words in human life, I suspect that it would become something very close to what in times past has been symbolized by the gift of tongues" (*Divisions on a Ground* 101). It is the power of this word that builds mansions in eternity, Eros restored out of the caverns of Prometheus, in which, to cite the great ruin of Pound's Cantos, "What thou lov'st well remains." ♦

Frye Bibliography

Robert D. Denham

It has been some time since the Frye bibliography was updated, and what follows does not constitute the results of a systematic search. It contains simply the things that have come across my desk in the past few years.

The Frye bibliography will be substantially altered during the next decade or so by the large editorial project now under way to publish *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. Alvin Lee of McMaster University is the general editor of this project, which is directed by a committee under the aegis of Victoria University through its Northrop Frye Centre, supported by a substantial grant from the Michael G. DeGroot family, and published by the University of Toronto Press. To date, three volumes have appeared: *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1932–1939* (2 vols.) and *Northrop Frye's Student Essays, 1933–1938*. Another four volumes are currently in press and will be out within the year: *Frye's*

Writings on the Bible and Religion, ed. Alvin Lee and Jean O'Grady, *Frye's Writings on Education*, ed. Goldwyn French and Jean O'Grady, and *Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks, 1985–1990* (2 vols.), ed. Robert D. Denham. Subsequent volumes in the series will include Frye's writings on Canada, ed. David Staines; on critical theory and mythology (3 vols.), ed. Germaine Warkentin, Eva Kushner, Joseph Adamson, and Jean Wilson; on Milton and Blake, ed. Angela Esterhammer; on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ed. Imre Saluszinsky; on twentieth-century literature, ed. Jeffrey Donaldson; and on modern culture, ed. Jan Gorak. Frye's writings on the Renaissance and Shakespeare and his major books—*Fearful Symmetry*, *Anatomy of Criticism*, *The Great Code*, and *Words with Power*—will eventually become a part of the edition. Michael Dolzani is completing his editing a selection of the post-*Anatomy* holograph notebooks, and my own editing of Frye's diaries from the 1940s and 1950s is nearing completion. The remaining unpublished writings that will eventually become a part of the *Collected Works* include a volume of his unpublished papers and five additional volumes of holograph and typed notebooks.

The first list that follows—Frye's Books—brings up to date all of the translations and editions of his books that I have been able to identify. It substantially expands the list that was published in vol. 5, no. 1, of the *Newsletter*. Except for the entries with asterisks, the copies are in my own collection. For 3g and 5f I have only photocopies. Not listed are the books that have been reprinted with covers different from their originals or with other slight variations. Page sizes are to the nearest centimeter. "Signed" indicates that the copy is autographed by Frye. The language of the translation is given for all transliterated titles. The list of Frye's books is followed by the secondary materials that have come to my attention, excluding reviews, practical applications of Frye's work, theses and dissertations, and incidental articles—all of which are too extensive to include here.

Frye's Books

1. Fearful Symmetry

- 1 *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947. 462 pp. 23.5 x 15.5 cm. Illustrations follow pp. 3, 74, 140, 208, 300, and 386. Casebound. *Signed*.
- 1a *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958. 462 pp. 23.5 x 15.5 cm. Illustrations follow p. 54. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 1b *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1962. 462 pp. 20.5 x 13.5 cm. Incorporates several minor changes and contains a preface written for this edition. Illustrations follow pp. 3, 74, 140, 208, 300, and 386. Paperback.
- 1c *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969. 462 pp. 21.5 x 13.5 cm. Same text as 1b, but with a preface written for this edition. Illustrations follow p. 54. Casebound. *Signed*.
- 1d *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969. 462 pp. 21.5 x 13.5 cm. Paperback.

- 1e *Agghiacciante simmetria: Uno studio su William Blake*. Trans. Carla Plevano Pezzini and Francesca Valente, with the assistance of Amleto Lorenzini. Milan: Longanesi, 1976. 492 pp. 21.5 x 14.5 cm. Contains, in addition to the preface of 1c, another preface written in 1975 for this translation. Illustrations follow p. 64. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed*.

2. Anatomy of Criticism

- 2 *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957. x + 383 pp. 23.3 x 15.3 cm. Casebound. *Signed*.
- 2a *Analyse der Literaturkritik*. Trans. Edgar Lohner and Henning Clewing. Foreword by Edgar Lohner. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1964. 380 pp. 21 x 13 cm. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 2b *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. New York: Atheneum, 1965. 383 pp. 21 x 13.3 cm. Paperback.
- 2c *Anatomie de la critique*. Trans. Guy Durand. Paris: Gallimard, 1969. 454 pp. 22.5 x 13.7 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed*.
- *2d *Anatomia della critica: Quattro saggi*. Trans. Paola Rosa-Clot and Sandro Stratta. Turin: Einaudi, 1969. 484 pp. No index in this translation. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 2e *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971. x + 383 pp. 21.6 x 13.8 cm. Paperback.
- 2f *Anatomia della critica: Quattro saggi*. Trans. Paola Rosa-Clot and Sandro Stratta, revised with the help of Amleto Lorenzini. Turin: Einaudi, [1972]. 484 pp. 18.1 x 10.7 cm. No index in this translation. 2nd (revised) ed. of 2d. Paperback.
- 2g *Anatomia criticii*. Trans. Domnica Sterian and Mihai Spariosu. Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1972. 473 pp. 19.9 x 12.9 cm. Includes a preface by Vera Calin. Paperback.
- 2h *Anatomia da critica*. Trans. Péricles Eugênio and Silva Ramos. Sao Paulo: Editora Cultrix, [1973]. 362 pp. 19.3 x 12.9 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed*.
- 2i *Anatomia de la critica: Cuatro ensayos*. Trans. Edison Simons. Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1977. 500 pp. 17.4 x 11.9 cm. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 2j *Anatomija kritike: Cetiri eseja*. Trans. Giga Garcan. Zagreb: Naprijed, 1979. 407 pp. 19.9 x 12.3 cm. Casebound. *Signed*.
- 2k *Hihyo no kaibo*. Trans. Hiroshi Ebine *et al.* Tokyo: Hosei University Press, 1980. viii + 529 + 34 pp. 18.7 x 12.5 cm. Includes a sketch of Frye's career by Hisaaki Yamanouchi, a bibliography of books by and about Frye, and translator's notes and acknowledgements. Casebound. In Japanese. *Signed*.
- 2l *Pi-pyong-ui Hae-bu*. Trans. Chol Kyu Yim. Seoul: Han-kil Sa, 1993. 535 pp. 22.4 x 15.2 cm. 12th prtg. of the 1st ed. (1982). Stiff paper wrappers. In Korean.
- 2m *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Korean Student Edition. N.p.: United Publishing and Promotion Co., Ltd., 1984. x + 383. 22.6 x 14.9 cm. "The Korean Student Edition is exclusively authorized by Princeton University Press for manufacture and distribution in the Republic of Korea." Paperback.
- 2n *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1990. x + 383 pp. 19.8 x 12.8 cm. Paperback.
- 2o *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Taipei: Bookman Books, Ltd n. d. x + 383 pp. 20.7 x 14.7 cm. "This is an authorized Taiwan edition published under special arrangement with the proprietor for sale in Taiwan only." Paperback.

2p *A kritika anatómiája: négy esszé.* Trans. József Szili. [Budapest]: Helikon Kiadó, 1998. 322 pp. 23.8 x 16.7 cm. Casebound.

3. *The Educated Imagination*

- 3 *The Educated Imagination.* Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963. 68 pp. 20.3 x 12.4 cm. Casebound.
- 3a *The Educated Imagination.* Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963. 68 pp. 20.3 x 12.7 cm. Paperback. *Signed.*
- 3b *The Educated Imagination.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964. 156 pp. 20.2 x 13.3 cm. Casebound. *Signed.*
- 3c *The Educated Imagination.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1966]. 156 pp. 19.9 x 12.9 cm. Paperback. *Signed.*
- 3d *The Educated Imagination.* Ed. Hisaaki Yamanouchi. Tokyo: Tsurumi shoten, 1967. viii + 135 pp. 18.2 x 12.7 cm. Paperback. *Signed.*
- 3e *Kyôjô no tame no sôzôryôko.* Trans. Toro Egawa and Masahiko Maeda. Tokyo: Taiyosha, 1969. 188 pp. 18.5 x 12.7 cm. Casebound. *Signed.* In Japanese.
- 3f *Pouvoirs de l'imagination: essai.* Trans. Jean Simard. Montreal: Editions HMH, 1969. 168 pp. 20.5 x 14 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed.*
- 3g *Sin-wha Mun-bak-non.* Trans. Sangil Kim. Seoul: Ul-you Mun-wha-sa, 1971. 155 pp. 17.2 x 10.3 cm. Photocopy. In Korean.
- 3h *L'immaginazione coltivata.* Trans. Amleto Lorenzini and Mario Manzari. Milan: Longanesi, 1974. 125 pp. 18.4 x 11.8 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed.*
- 3i *Takhyayul-i jarikhtab.* Trans. and with a preface by Saeed Arbaab-Shirani. Tihran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Danishgahi [Centre for University Publications], 1984. 99 pp. 21.4 x 14.2 cm. Paperback. In Farsi.
- 3j *The Educated Imagination.* Toronto: House of Anansi, 1993. 68 pp. 24 x 12.7 cm. Paperback. In Persian.
- 3k *Mun-bak-ni Ku-cho-wa Sang-sang-hyok.* Trans. Sang-woo Lee. Seoul: Chip-mun-dang, 1992. The volume also includes two essays by Frye, "Literature and Myth" (pp. 119-42) and "The Archetypes of Literature" (pp. 143-62), as well as the translator's analysis, based on Frye's criticism, of the mythical imagery in the writings of Kim Donginby (pp. 163-87). First trans. and pub. in 1964; this, the 2nd prtg. of the 1st ed. (1987). 201 pp. 22.5 x 15.2 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. In Korean.

4. *Fables of Identity*

- 4 *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963. 265 pp. 20.2 x 13.5 cm. Paperback. *Signed.*
- 4a *Favole d'identità: Studi di mitologia poetica.* Trans. Ciro Monti. Turin: Einaudi, 1973. ix + 346 pp. 18 x 10.5 cm. Paperback. *Signed.*
- 4b *Doitsusei no gunwa.* Trans. Tetso Maruko et al. Tokyo: Hosei University Press, 1983. iv + 469 + 9 pp. 18.7 x 12.5 cm. Includes translator's notes and epilogue. Casebound. In Japanese.

5. *T.S. Eliot*

- 5 *T.S. Eliot.* Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963. 106 pp. 18.2 x 11.4 cm. Paperback.

- *5a *T.S. Eliot*. New York: Grove, 1963. 106 pp. Paperback.
- *5b *T.S. Eliot*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966. 106 pp. Paperback.
- 5c *T.S. Eliot*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968. 106 pp. 18.2 x 11.4 cm. Revised ed. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 5d *Eliot*. Trans. Jesús Diaz. Madrid: Ediciones y Publicaciones Españolas, 1969. 173 pp. 17 x 11 cm. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 5e *T.S. Eliot*. New York: Capricorn Books, 1972. 106 pp. 18.4 x 10.9 cm. Paperback.
- 5f *T.S. Eliot*. Trans. Tae-kun Kang. Seoul: Tam-ku-dang, 1979. 156 pp. 17.5 x 9.5 cm. Photocopy. In Korean.
- 5g *T.S. Eliot: An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. 109 pp. 20.3 x 13.1 cm. Includes updated bibliography of secondary sources. Paperback. *Signed*.
- 5h *T.S. Eliotto*. Trans. Hikaru Endo. Tokyo: Shimizukobun-do, 1981. xvi + 150 + 71 pp. 20.8 x 14.6 cm. Casebound in slipcase. In Japanese.
- *5I *Eliot-ron*. Trans. Mun-hak-gwa So-hoi-yon-ku-so [Center for Literature and Society]. Seoul: Chong-ha, 1986. In Korean.
- 5j *Eliot*. Trans. Gino Scatasta. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989. 126 pp. 20.4 x 12.3 cm. Paperback.
- 5k *T.S. Eliot-ni Si-se-kye*. Trans. Yun-ki Hong. Seoul: Myong-mun-dang, 1991. Bound together with the English version, 5g. 154 + [i–viii] + 109 pp. Stiff paper wrappers. Pp. 1–154 in Korean.

6. The Well-Tempered Critic

- 6 *The Well-Tempered Critic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. 160 pp. 20.3 x 13.3 cm. Casebound. *Signed*.
- 6a *The Well-Tempered Critic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965. 160 pp. 19.9 x 13 cm. Paperback.
- 6b *Il critico ben temperato*. Trans. Amleto Lorenzini and Mario Manzari. Milan: Longanesi, 1974. 141 pp. 18.4 x 11.7 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed*.
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- 6d *The Well-Tempered Critic*. Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, [1983]. 160 pp. 18.4 x 12.4 cm. Paperback.
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9b *Tempo che opprime, tempo che redime: Riflessioni sul teatro di Shakespeare*. Trans. Valentina Poggi and Maria Pia De Angelis. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986. 197 pp. 21.2 x 13.3 cm. Part 1 (pp. 13-113) is a trans. by Valentina Poggi of *Fools of Time*. Part 2 (pp. 115-197) is a trans. by Maria Pia De Angelis of *The Myth of Deliverance*. Paperback.

10. The Modern Century

10 *The Modern Century*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967. 123 pp. 18.4 x 11.7 cm. Casebound. *Signed*.

*10a *Le siècle de l'innovation: essai*. Trans. François Rinfret. Montreal: Editions HMH, 1968. 162 pp. 19.7 x 12.5 cm. Paperback.

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10c *The Modern Century*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969. 123 pp. 20.3 x 13.3 cm. Paperback. *Signed*.

10d *Cultura e miti del nostro tempo*. Trans. Vittorio Di Giuro. Milan: Rizzoli, 1969. 120 pp. 20.6 x 14.8 cm. Stiff paper wrappers. *Signed*.

10e *Gendai bunka no hyaku nen*. Trans. Hiroshi Ebine. Tokyo: Otowa shobo, 1971. 152 pp. 18.6 x 12.5 cm. Casebound. *Signed*. In Japanese.

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- 11c *Igrisu Romanshyuugi no Shinwa*. Trans. Michiko Watanabe. Tokyo: Yashio suppansha, 1985. 245 pp. 18 x 12.7 cm. Casebound in slipcase. In Japanese.

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- 21b *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983. viii + 90 pp. 21.4 x 13.9 cm. Paperback.

- 21c *Tempo che opprime, tempo che redime: Riflessioni sul teatro di Shakespeare*. Trans. Valentina Poggi and Maria Pia De Angelis. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986. 197 pp. 21.2 x 13.3 cm. Part 1 (pp. 13-113) is a trans. by Valentina Poggi of *Fools of Time*. Part 2 (pp. 115-197) is a trans. by Maria Pia De Angelis of *The Myth of Deliverance*. Paperback.
- 21d *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. Intro. A. C. Hamilton. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. 21.4 x 13.8 cm. Paperback.
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- 23d *Shakespeare et son théâtre*. Trans. Charlotte Melançon. Paris: Boréal-Express, 1988. 272 pp. 21.4 x 13.7 cm. Paperback.
- 23e *Shakespeare: Nove lezioni*. Trans. Andrea Carosso. Turin: Einaudi, 1990. x + 201 pp. 25 x 12.3 cm. Paperback.
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25. Mito metafora simbolo

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26. Myth and Metaphor

26 *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974-1988*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990. xviii + 386 pp. 23.5 x 15.3 cm. Casebound.

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29c *La duplice visione: linguaggio e significato nella religione*. Trans. Francesca Valente Gorjup and Carla Plevano Pezzini. Preface by Agostino Lombardo. Venice: Marsilio, 1993. 101 pp. 21.3 x 15.4 cm. Paperback.

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36 Northrop Frye: Selected Essays

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Secondary Sources

Books

The Legacy of Northrop Frye, ed. Alvin A. Lee and Robert D. Denham. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. Xxxvii + 353 pp. Twenty-nine essays, a libretto of an auditory masque, and a poem by Margaret Atwood. All but one of the papers were originally presented at a 1992 conference on Frye's legacy.

Fu-lai yen chin: Chung-kuo yü his fang [*Frye Studies: China and the West*], ed. Ning Wang and Yen-sung Hsü. Beijing: Chung-kuo she hui k'o hsüeh ch'u pan she [Social Sciences Press of China], 1996. 242 pp. Essays (in Chinese) drawn largely from the conference on "Northrop Frye and China" held at the university of Beijing, 12–17 July 1994. Contains essays presented at the conference by A.C. Hamilton, Joseph Adamson, Kang Liu, Eva Kushner, Ian Balfour, Aiming Cheng, Ning Wang, Jonathan Hart, Ersu Ding, Hui Zhang, Fengzheng Wang, Robert Denham, Suxian Ye, Naiying Liu, and Yiman Wang, plus additional essays by Mario Valdes, Linda Hutcheon, and Roseann Runte. The articles of Balfour, Adamson, and Denham appeared earlier in *Foreign Literatures* 1 (1995): 3–21.

Gyalokay, Monique-Anne. *Rousseau, Northrop Frye et la Bible: Essai de mythocritique*. Paris: Champion Honoré, 1999. 216 pp.

Ricciardi, Caterina. *Northrop Frye, o, Delle finzioni supreme*. Rome: Empiria, 1992. 111 pp. Three essays on Frye, two of which were previously published.

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Rereading Frye: The Published and Unpublished Works, ed. David Boyd and Imre Salusinszky. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. Essays by Michael Dolzani, Jonathan Hart, Joseph Adamson, A.C. Hamilton, Péter Pásztor, and Robert D. Denham, with a preface by Alvin A. Lee and an introduction by the editors. The essays, except for Pásztor's, were developed from a research seminar held at the University of Newcastle, Australia, in July 1994.

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- Cavell, Richard. "Where Is Frye? Or, Theorizing Postcolonial Space." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 56 (Fall 1995): 110–35. Uses Frye's ideas of architecture and structure to describe Canadian culture.
- Chellappan, K. "Northrop Frye as a Canadian Structuralist." *Literary Theory: (Re)Reading Culture and Aesthetics*, ed. Jameela Begum and B. Hariharan. Delhi: Pencraft International, 1997. 130–44. On Frye's contribution to the study of Canadian literature.
- Cosgel, Metin M. "Metaphors, Stories, and the Entrepreneur in Economics." *History of Political Economy*, 28, no. 1 (1996): 57–76. Uses Frye's five modes to classify the different visions of the entrepreneur in economic "stories."
- Cotrupi, Nella. "Vico, Burke, and Frye's Flirtation with the Sublime." *Giambattista Vico and Anglo-American Science: Philosophy and Writing*, ed. Marcel Danesi. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1955. 35–49.
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Globe and Mail

Northrop Frye at Home and Abroad

Jean O'Grady

*[Jean O'Grady, assistant editor of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, presented this paper to the Senior Alumni of the University of Toronto on 23 October 1997. She illustrated her talk with several charts and diagrams, the references to which have been deleted.]*

Northrop Frye
What a guy
Read more books than
You or I

So begins a ditty about Frye popular at one time among undergraduates at Victoria College. It encapsulates the local view of Frye—affectionate, proprietorial, somewhat in awe of the great man but by no means overwhelmed. There is a curious dichotomy between this picture of Frye and that of the eminent man of letters celebrated by the world at large. Frye became an international phenomenon, the literary critic who opened up criticism as a discipline in its own right, and adumbrated a vast structure for the whole of literature. His books have been translated into seventeen languages including Serbo-Croatian, Korean, and Portuguese; his theories have been used to elucidate works from Old English to Russian. Italy takes a particular interest in him, and hosted a conference on his works in Bologna in 1987. In the Far East, too, he is a hot property, and Professor Wu of Inner Mongolia is hard at work translating his early essays. The Northrop Frye papers in the Victoria University Library contain letters from twenty-six different colleges and universities offering Frye a job—and this is just in the eighteen years between 1959 and 1977. The offers range from a permanent appointment as Mackenzie King Professor at Harvard to a job in the English Department at Arizona State U.

In spite of this world-wide fame, and of thirty-eight honorary degrees, Frye spent most of his working life at the (with all due respects) comparatively obscure Victoria College in the University of Toronto. He enrolled as an undergraduate in the college in 1929, studying Philosophy and English; then after his graduation he studied theology at Emmanuel, the theological college of Victoria University, while doing some part-time lecturing in the college English Department. As it became apparent that teaching was his vocation, the college authorities helped to send him to England for two years, to round out his English studies at Merton College. He persevered there, in spite of finding Oxford “dismally cold, wet, clammy, muggy, damp, and moist, like a morgue,” but was relieved to be taken on permanently in the English Department at Victoria in 1939. There he remained, except for spells as visiting professor, until his retirement. For years he rode the subway to work like any beginning lecturer, expounded his pass course in Biblical symbolism to undergraduates of every degree of sophistication, probably spent Saturday afternoons grading essays.

I first met him in this guise myself in 1960. I was going to study English Lang. and Lit. and had been advised by my high school guidance counsellor to enroll at Victoria so that I would, as they say, “get Frye.” I did get him, for several courses, and an amazing figure he was: dumpy and pastey-coloured, with an almost shifty air, as if he didn’t quite belong inside this mortal envelope, he would open his mouth and in a quiet and unemphatic voice give expression to the most searching analysis, the most suggestive generalizations, the most piercing insights, all in sentences and whole paragraphs perfectly controlled and modulated. Even his witty remarks were delivered deadpan, with just the occasional quick upturn at the side of his mouth if you seemed to get the joke.

Going back into the past, here’s a reminiscence of Frye as a lecturer by one of his students in 1946, political columnist Douglas Fisher, who had just arrived at college under the veterans’ preference with many other former soldiers:

Our class, perhaps 40 [people], was stiff. The general tone was serious, almost apprehensive. It reeked of both earnestness and doubt. . . . At 9.05 a slight chap walked in, his suit too large, a dour Russian quality about its hang and texture. He was blond, his hair heavy, but haloed with wisps and snarls. [In his younger days, this blond mop had earned him the nickname “Buttercup.”] On first look, he seemed prissy, uncomfortable, yet curiously like a robot. Stiff—and we were stiffer.

He began while staring out the window. . . . “My subject today is George Bernard Shaw . . .”, and he was away. A tape recorder would have picked up little but the teacher’s voice. Except for an occasional titter, the class didn’t loosen up. When the bell rang, the man stopped talking, bobbed his head, and left.

He was no sooner gone from the room when an uproar of comments made the place noisy. “This can’t be university, it’s too entertaining.” “What’s this man’s name?” A girl beside me looked at me for seconds but her mind wasn’t there. When her beatific smile

finally broke, she said, “That was better than any movie I’ve ever seen.” What I knew was—if this was university, I wanted a lot more of it, and the teacher. . . . What a break! Northrop Frye as first voice heard at university.

Frye was always the opposite of grandstanding or charismatic, the conduit of a force that came purely from the mind and owed nothing to physical stature. In 1950, when he spent a year as a visiting professor at Harvard, he went to a store where the proprietors took a friendly interest in the students. As Frye relates it, “the clerk asked me what I was studying, and I said, with only a touch of shrillness, that I was teaching. Just for the summer, of course. He wrapped my parcel, handed it to me, and said, “And I hope your permanent appointment comes through all right.”

Working on the Collected Works of Northrop Frye I encounter another form of this contrast between appearance and reality. Perhaps most of you are already aware of this project, started under the auspices of Victoria University and now liberally supported by McMaster: but I hope you’ll forgive me for taking the opportunity for a bit of publicity. Under the general editorship of Alvin Lee, we hope to bring out some thirty volumes of Frye’s writings. I’ve brought along the first two volumes, recently published, the letters Frye and his future wife Helen exchanged between 1932 and 1939. These are edited by Robert D. Denham (please feel free to order on your way out). From the point of view of my present theme, what is interesting is that the Collected Works is to include not just the previously-published articles and books, but also, as you see, some of the private papers Frye deposited in the Victoria Library. As well as the letters, these include diaries and a whole series of notebooks. Frye thought in writing, and in these notebooks he wrestled with trains of thought, worked and re-worked the shapes of his books, and reflected on his own strengths and weaknesses. Just to give one example—this is not in a notebook but on a separate sheet of paper headed STATEMENT FOR THE DAY OF MY DEATH:

The twentieth century saw an amazing development of scholarship and criticism in the humanities, carried out by people who were more intelligent, better trained, had more languages, had a better sense of proportion, and were infinitely more accurate scholars and competent professional men than I. I had genius. No one else in the field known to me had quite that.

In donating these papers to a public repository, Frye must have forseen their eventual publication. It is not too much to say that they open up an entirely new Frye unsuspected by the general public and even by most of his friends and associates. Already I’m told that people who have read the Frye and Helen letters are amazed, their usual reaction being, “I never would have believed that Northrop Frye was so amorous!” And who would believe that Frye longed to write a novel—indeed, to write eight novels, each in a different mode, covering between them all types of fiction from the comedy of manners to the war novel. He is sometimes accused of being exclusively concerned with western

literature, yet these notebooks reveal that he was quietly studying Eastern philosophy in the 40s, long before it became fashionable, and that he hoped to write what he called a “Bardo” novel based on inter-life existence as described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. His published works seem complicated enough, but in his private schemes he was constantly trying to slot what he had written into a vast eight-fold circle which would mirror the novels on the critical level, besides forming parallels with the different divisions of the Bible, the parts of the Blakean corpus, not to mention the musical keys, the colours, and the astrological signs. Hayden White spoke more truly than he knew when he remarked that he sensed a subterranean Frye—that when talking to Frye he “had the feeling that he was always in that shop in the back of the mind of which Montaigne spoke, working on some intellectual issue.”

In suggesting this series of contrasts, between inner man and public persona, awkward figure and eloquent speaker, Toronto teacher and international icon, I’m working with categories that are not exactly parallel. But I feel I have a warrant in the practice of Frye himself, that inveterate manipulator of equivalents, correspondences, and categories. The particular binary oppositions I’ve been suggesting seem to me important because they lead in to something very central to Frye’s thought, which might best be described as the relation between the individual and his society. In Frye’s case, the question involves his own Canadianness and his Protestant inheritance. How is the individual absolutely himself yet the committed member of a corporate entity? The question is parallel to one encountered in his literary criticism, where Frye maintained that he recognized the uniqueness of the work of art, while his critics complained that he was obliterating it by relating the work to generic and archetypal patterns.

As background to these matters I’d like to take a few minutes to look at the outlines of Frye’s thought as a whole. This will be familiar ground to some of you, but I hope not to all. Though Frye first gained recognition with his book on Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*, in 1947, it was the *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957 that brought him world-wide attention. In this book he argued for literary criticism as a scientific discipline with a coherent structure of its own, as opposed on the one hand to the dilettantish and belle-lettrist approach that pointed out the beauties and flaws of individual works, and on the other to the historical approach which related works to their times and thus made criticism a mere parasite on history. The *Anatomy* took a sweeping overview of western literature from its origins to the present, and in Aristotelian fashion mapped out its genera and species. One of its main contentions was that poems take the forms they do because of the imperatives of literature, not because of the author’s desire to capture life or to express his own individuality. Poems are made from other poems; or, in the words of Yeats, “There is no singing school but studying / Monuments of its own magnificence.”

Criticism could look at the forms taken by literature from several different perspectives, expounded in the four main chapters of the book. Historical criticism, in the First Essay, saw writing devolve in a way most conveniently encapsulated by the status of its

hero. [By the way, I apologize for the use of non-inclusive language. Frye always insisted that terms like “he” and “man” *were* inclusive, on Sydney Smith’s principle that “man generally embraces woman.”] Anyway, Frye saw the history of literature as the increasing displacement of a mythic core towards realism. Thus in earliest times we have myth itself, in which the hero is a god-figure superior in kind to other men and his environment. In romance, which flowered in the Middle Ages, the hero is a human being but one with unusual powers, and his actions escape somewhat from the laws of nature. The Renaissance brings us to the dominance of the high mimetic mode, where the hero is superior in degree to other men, but subject to ordinary laws of nature—typically, he is a prince, the hero of tragedy. As realistic fiction develops in the low mimetic mode, the hero becomes an ordinary person, one of us. And in the ironic mode increasingly prominent in the twentieth century, the hero is an anti-hero or powerless man, as in Beckett and Kafka, and the reader looks down on scenes of frustration and absurdity. I haven’t time to go into the subdivisions of this schema, which by describing a tragic and a comic form of each mode, a naive or sentimental version of each of those, and a parallel sequence of thematic modes, moves from five to forty different categories.

The Second Essay of the *Anatomy* (Ethical Criticism) approaches literature not historically, but as a simultaneous existence in the present, and suggests five different phases of criticism based largely on symbolism. For Frye, images are not just incidental figures stuck on to make a piece of writing more vivid. The very essence of literature, which is a hypothetical mode addressed to the imagination, is metaphor. From the earliest stories which identified the gods with parts of the natural world, as with sky-gods and sea-gods and so on, the essential literary and imaginative act has been to identify some aspect of the natural world with some aspect of humanity. On the literal level we can look at the poem as an individual unit whose images and sounds relate internally to each other; on the descriptive, we study its relation to the world it reflects. The formal phase unites both to get at its meaning. Finally we move into the last two phases of archetypal and anagogical criticism which are Frye’s particular province. On the archetypal level we relate the poem to literature as a whole, studying genres and conventions; and on the anagogical level, we see literature as a total order of words organized metaphorically, a vast imaginative construct which presents man’s vision of the world as he wishes it to be: from this perspective, nature has been completely humanized, and the distinction between subject and object, nature and perceiving mind has been obliterated. This, Frye says, is the imaginative model for human work, the vision of paradise regained.

The details of archetypal criticism, studied in the Third Essay of the *Anatomy*, are organized into two areas, the static and the dynamic. Statically, Frye discerns two archetypal groups corresponding to the two extremes of wish and nightmare: the apocalyptic imagery of gardens, sheepfolds, bread and wine, holy cities and so on, which are the metaphors of human desire, and the demonic imagery of monsters, waste lands, and fiery furnaces, which define all that man rejects. For the dynamic movement of plot, Frye invoked one of the

most basic patterns, the cycle—as in the changing of the year from spring, to summer, to fall, to winter, and back to spring—phases which correspond with the movement of the day into night, with the human life-cycle, and with the process of disillusionment. (It's unfortunate to point out to the senior alumni that we're on the downside of the cycle, along with Leviathan and the desert). In what was probably his most influential and widely-accepted contribution to criticism, Frye distinguished four basic, pre-generic plot types: comedy, where the movement is from complications and difficulties into marriage and the birth of a new society; romance, whose action takes place in a summer world where ordinary laws are suspended; tragedy, which moves from a high point to death and defeat; and irony, imprisoned in a world below the human. These archetypal plots occur throughout the different historical modes, as do the character-types associated with them: thus the tricky servant in the plays of Plautus is reincarnated in the figure of our friend Jeeves, and the feast at the end of Roman comedy is still going strong in the last pages of *Larry's Party*.

Finally, and as somewhat of an anti-climax, the fourth essay in the *Anatomy* discusses rhetorical criticism, in which literature is looked at according to the genres, such as epic, lyric, and satire.

Anatomy of Criticism was received with tremendous intellectual excitement, though by no means with universal assent. It ushered in that explosion of criticism which has made theory the dominant genre in the last half of the twentieth century. Some critics, appalled at its encyclopaedic subdivisions, balked at the thought that swallowing such an enormous pill was necessary for its salutary effects. Frye always denied the accusation that he was trying to make everyone accept his whole "system" like a straightjacket; he remarked to an interviewer that perhaps he would ultimately be found less useful as a systemizer than as a quarry for later thinkers, "a kind of lumber-room for later generations...a resource person for anyone to explore and get ideas from." He also declared his own indifference to his future reputation: "If posterity doesn't like me, the hell with posterity—I won't be living in it anyway."

But perhaps the major criticism levelled was that the book minimized the writer's immediate involvement in and meaning for his society. The anagogic level was either ignored or disbelieved in, and Frye was criticized for suggesting an autonomous literary universe to be studied in and for itself, cut off from social history, from authorial imperatives, and from the realistic representation of the world. Criticisms of this sort ranged from Ezra Pound's reported, "Anagogical? Hell's bells, *nobody* knows what that is!" to the more magisterial words of a critic: "It is a dehistoricization and desocialization of life, ontologically a despecification." The Frygian critic seemed a dry anatomist, utterly uninvolved in the needs of his readers for guidance and wisdom and of his society for literary culture.

The criticism of remoteness from ordinary society and its concerns, applied to Frye himself as a critic, was radically unjust: even at the time of the *Anatomy* he was deeply involved in Canadian culture. He worked out his critical principles from his study of William

Blake, but he honed them on Canadian poetry: and not Canadian poetry as we have it today, but Canadian poetry of the pre-Atwood era. For ten years, from 1951 to 1960, he wrote the “Poetry in English” section of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*’s annual survey of Canadian literature. To produce this he had to read virtually all the poetry published during the preceding twelve months—a mixed bag, as you can imagine. Wit and word-play abound in Frye’s reviews, whatever might be said of the poems. For instance, “One can get as tired of buttocks in Mr. Layton as of buttercups in the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*.” Of the book *First Flowering*, which collected high-school poets, he remarked that none of these youngsters was likely to become a professional poet. “If there were any such, the book, for them, would be better entitled First Deflowering.”

As a reviewer, Frye was not entirely bound by his own notorious stand against value-judgments, that the function of the academic critic is not to sit on high pronouncing whether a work is good or bad, but rather to see what the work is trying to do and how it relates to existing literature. Indeed, he bore witness to his less-noticed concession that value judgments are inevitable on one level, even though they may reflect only one’s cultural conditioning. He hit upon some ingenious ways of commenting on poems that were unlikely to be keepers. “Arthur Bourinot’s *The Treasures of the Snow* affects a very short line which would be well adapted for bringing out rhythmical subtleties if there were more subtleties to bring out.” “Of [the books] in the check-list below, some achieve a certain uniform competence, . . . but otherwise there is nothing for a reviewer to say except to hope that they will find their audience.” Edna Jaques was one of the most popular poets of the time. “The opening lines of her book indicate her mastery of the central technical device of nostalgic verse, a list of reminders or stimuli, vigorously checked off one after the other:

The strong clean smell of yellow soap,
A farmer plowing with a team,
The taste of huckleberry pie
A pan of milk with wrinkled cream.

No, if this kind of thing is worth writing, Miss Jaques is certainly the person who knows best how to write it, and all our poets who are ambitious of belonging to the ‘conservative’ or ‘romantic’ school should learn about nostalgia from her.”

In spite of such equivocations, necessary to one who was expected to comment on every offering, he kept in mind that his primary function was to elucidate. In his Canadian reviews he showed that reading current poetry is an essential cultural activity, “the poetic conversation of cultivated people,” and thus he helped to build up a reading public that would allow an indigenous, mature literature to flower.

Theoretically, too, Frye elaborated on the social role of literature in studies of the relation between the poet, or the critic, and his society. Though he continued to produce a stream of practical criticism—books on Shakespeare, Milton, and T.S. Eliot, articles on the

Renaissance, Yeats, Joyce, Samuel Butler, and numerous others—he also wrote books like *The Well-Tempered Critic* (1963) and *The Critical Path* (1971). In the latter, subtitled “An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism,” he introduced a new terminology and a new twist to the word “myth.” Frye saw a constant dialectic in human history between the myth of concern and the myth of freedom. The myth of concern is society’s central mythology, the body of what it believes as a society and what holds it together. Later Frye split it into primary concern, essentials like food, sex, property, and freedom of movement, and secondary concern, the structures of religion, politics, and ideology. The myth of freedom is the liberal, generally scientific opposition which criticizes the myth of concern from an individualistic point of view. Poets, Frye says, are basically children of concern in that they address mankind’s enduring hopes and fears. No longer, of course, do they speak for a central mythology generally shared by society. Instead of the myth of concern that society offers, which tends to conformity and received ideas, literature offers a blueprint of concern which is hypothetical, incorporates the questionings of the myth of freedom, and is not to be believed in implicitly but held in the mind as an imaginative model. Viewed as a whole (and here you’ll notice the anagogic level of the *Anatomy* reappearing) literature presents a total body of possible belief, a “great code” of concern or vision of society that the critic explicates.

Frye’s interest in the social context of literature led him to consider increasingly the role of language in all its aspects, literary and non-literary, in constituting human culture; latterly he tended to define himself as a “cultural critic” rather than a “literary critic.” His two last weighty books, *The Great Code* in 1982, and *Words with Power* in 1990, both begin with expositions of the theory of language that respond to the explosion of linguistics and semiotics in the previous decades. Language is seen to go through three phases, the metaphorical, the dialectical, and the descriptive, corresponding roughly to an age of stories, an age of reasoned argument, and an age of science. Literature keeps alive the earliest, metaphoric phase of language, and in his last works Frye delved into the basic source for those metaphors in the Bible. (I’m sure some of you became acquainted with this in your Religious Knowledge Option course.) Again there are two aspects, the cyclical and the dialectical. Looked at as a plot, or mythos, the Bible is a comedy: it gives the history of mankind, under the name of Israel, from creation in paradise, through a fall into time and encroaching darkness, to apocalypse and the regaining of paradise, with a series of falls and recoveries in between. Seen dialectically, its imagery falls into the two categories, mentioned before, of apocalyptic and demonic imagery.

Ultimately, all these figures on page 106 of *The Great Code* can be identified with a single figure, which is Christ. This human figure is both the fulfilled individual and the giant form of his society. In Paul’s words, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ;” in Frye’s interpretation, “the community with which the individual is identical is no longer a whole of which he is a part, but another aspect of himself.” Frye’s *Return of Eden* ends with “the realization that there is only one man, one mind, and one world, and that all walls of

partition have been broken down forever.” Frye is not inculcating religious doctrine here, since from a literary point of view “belief” in Christ is not in question. Rather he is pointing out that mankind’s imagination culminates in a single human figure who is both one and many, the individual glorified as his social body.

Those of you familiar with Blake will recognize that Frye has come full circle. Blake’s universe is populated by mighty figures—the human imagination as the chained Los, a vengeful God as the stern Urizen. For Blake it is the local that becomes the universal, not some construct abstracted from many locals and resembling none; he believed in the radiance of the particular—a world in a grain of sand, eternity in an hour. In so stating, I too hope to have come full circle, recalling my opening question of the relation of the individual to his society. Society—that is, a real society, is the fulfilment of the individual, not an obliteration of him.

A corollary to this doctrine is the importance of roots, of starting from one particular time and place. Where you are, Frye would say, can be the centre of the universe, with the circumference the reach of the imagination, potentially infinite. This may recall Frye’s famous remark that the question in Canadian literature was not so much “Who am I?” as “Where is here?” Successful literatures are apt to be regional, rooted in a particular place such as Faulkner’s southern states or Margaret Laurence’s Manawaki. In individual terms, you belong to something before you are something; from the moment you draw breath you are defined by sex, class, nationality. Growing up is a long and arduous process of what Jung would call individuation. It involves certainly escaping the uncritical acceptance of the norms of society and transcending the limitations of sex, class, and so on. But the goal of the process is not an isolated individual but a social being, one with ties to all of mankind.

This brings us naturally to Frye’s educational theories. He lived through exciting times for education. When he began teaching, the Ontario government was just being influenced by the tail end of the progressive or Deweyite movement, with its demand for a more useful and practical curriculum geared for “life” and involving “the whole child.” Later, after Russia launched its Sputnik, he weathered the demand for an increasingly technological education geared towards tangible scientific achievement. Still later came the upheavals of the 60s and 70s, with radical student demands for “relevance” and complete freedom to design one’s own curriculum. Frye was actually spending a term as visiting lecturer at Berkeley when the first violent student unrest broke out in the spring of 1969, leading him to say that the student radicals reminded him of a sentence in an old cook-book: “Brains are very perishable, and unless frozen or pre-cooked, should be used as soon as possible.” And finally there was the outcry over “the canon,” and the rejection of all those miserable dead white males who wrote the great books. Frye’s response was consistently to defend the values of a traditional, disinterested liberal education. “An arts degree is useless,” he would say, “if it isn’t, it isn’t worth a damn.”

Frye saw that the student came to university stuffed with the clichés and received ideas of a society that was essentially unreal and phantasmagoric. Fads come and go, an

endless line of consumer goods are consumed or thrown away, politicians are assassinated, millions mourn a Diana they never knew. For four years, the student could withdraw himself from this society, and concentrate on the more stable forms proffered by mankind's achievements in the arts and sciences: on what Frye called the authority of the logical argument, the repeatable experiment, the compelling imagination. The student of literature engages with that total order of words that I sketched earlier, which provides a model for man's work and suggests a notional society, classless and enlightened; in fact the title of one of Frye's educational pieces is "We are teaching a vision of society."

Frye's rather subdued, egoless presence as a teacher is therefore deliberate: he aimed at being a transparent medium between student and work. The source of authority in the classroom is not the teacher but the writer being studied, and the impersonal authority of the subject itself. He went so far as to say that the relation between teacher and student was rather an embarrassing one, and that the best moments in the classroom were those in which it was obliterated by a joint vision of the subject. In the light of this glimpsed vision provided by culture, the student will be a radical critic of what is: far from becoming a "well-rounded" individual, with its comfortable overtones of contentment and softness, he is likely to be mal-adjusted and crotchety. Like Socrates, the teacher has for his aim that of corrupting youth.

Sometimes Frye wondered if it was too late, when a student reached university, to influence his mind, already pre-programmed by TV and advertisements. He became involved then in schemes for earlier education, helping to found a Curriculum Institute in which university professors joined with elementary and high school teachers to suggest improvements in the curriculum, and later overseeing the production of a series of English readers for grades 7 to 13. His ideal early childhood education began with rhythm and chant and fantastic stories, with the enduring narratives of the Bible and classical myth, and encompassed at ever deeper levels the narratives of comedy and romance, tragedy and irony. His concern was to keep the imagination in play, for only through imagination could the individual think metaphorically and engage in the play of mind through language that constructed reality in human form.

Such was his notion of the mature individual in relation to his conditioning: and what of Frye himself? The particular milieu he was born into was middle-class, white, Canadian, and Methodist. Methodists were supposed to undergo a "conversion," the defining experience of their lives, when they are convinced of their utter sinfulness and of God's ability to forgive them. It's typical of Frye that *he* underwent an anti-conversion: having been brought up by a church-going mother, at the age of about fifteen, walking to school, as he put it, "the whole shitty, smelly garment of fundamentalism dropped off into the sewer and stayed there," and he realized that he had never really believed in the vengeful God who threw the bad guys into hell and rewarded the godly with a permanent spot in the heavenly choir. Nevertheless, he remained within the Protestant tradition, imbued with its Bible culture, its radical individualism, its emphasis on the spirit. He trained as a minister,

then, when it became apparent that he was temperamentally unsuited to the ministry, taught at the originally Methodist college of Victoria, and sought all his life to define a religion that did justice to man's spirituality without falling into what he saw as superstitious idolatry.

The religion he defined was radical to say the least; by the time of his last book, *The Double Vision*, he had virtually jettisoned the ideas of God the father, of the historical Jesus as an atoning figure, of the afterlife, of the creation as a historical event, and of the apocalypse as something that was likely to happen. As we might guess, they're all metaphors. What remains is the figure of Jesus, who is the creative principle within man linking man with the divine, and through whose vision man sees the eternal here and now. Often enough in his early years Frye felt the deficiency of the eternal at Victoria, with its endless fussing over locking the girls into residence by 11 p.m. and never serving a glass of wine; but, particularly as the multiversity developed, he stressed the vital importance of the church-based colleges with their specific traditions.

This is not to say that he was always at ease in his group. Colleagues remember him in the Senior Common Room, not talking but filling in the *Times* crossword puzzle, which he could complete in about half an hour. One professor recalls trying out a bit of conversation at lunch time the day after the big Quebec election: "Well, Norrie, what's the significance of the PQ victory?", whereupon Norrie only snapped, "How the hell would I know?" and returned to eating his soup. Yet he always felt he, his colleagues, and his students formed a community and he enjoyed being part it, even to serving as its Principal for nine years.

As for his Canadian identity, that was also something he cherished. He could no more be an American than he could be a Catholic, and he was true to his roots in not forsaking Canada for the more lucrative field of the U.S. According to his reading, Canadians differed from the Americans both geographically and historically. In its history Canada had skipped over, intellectually speaking, the rational eighteenth century, and was always the home of a more Tory, less revolutionary attitude than the American. Geographically, Canada lacked an eastern seaboard where settlement was concentrated, and the immense distances stretching out between isolated towns led to a garrison mentality in regard to nature. Such speculations on the nature of Canadianness, along with essays on Canadian painting and literary figures from Haliburton to Ethel Wilson, will occupy two volumes of the *Collected Works*. Perhaps the chief piece will be the conclusion he wrote to the *Literary History of Canada*, of which he was an editor. It was one of the most satisfying aspects of his life to see Canadian literature, which was still a provincial backwater when he began, flower into the magnificent literature that we have now—a development that arguably owes something to his efforts.

Frye once defined the Canadian genius as the ability to produce strange hybrids, such as the University of Toronto in education, the United Church in religion, and Confederation in politics. He himself has some of this Canadian characteristic of contrasting entities strangely combined: the local teacher and the world celebrity, the committed Christian and the man who didn't know whether Christ ever existed and didn't think it much

mattered, the believer in community and the shy introvert, the eloquent speaker and the tongue-tied conversationalist. On this showing, he himself was one of our most characteristic as well as our most famous products. ♦

The *Northrop Frye Newsletter* publishes material by and about Frye and his criticism. The editor welcomes contributions related to this aim. The *Newsletter* is published occasionally and is distributed without charge to all who request it. Publication is supported by the English Department at Roanoke College. Address all correspondence to the editor, Robert Denham, English Department, Roanoke College, Salem, VA 24153. *Copyright* © 1999 by Robert D. Denham
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Frye & the Word:
Religious Contexts in the Criticism of Northrop Frye

The Department of English and the Department of Religious Studies of McMaster University will host a conference focussing on the religious contexts of Frye's thought, 17–19 May 2000, on the McMaster campus. A selection of conference papers will be published. For more information, write: "Frye and the Word" / Department of English / McMaster University / 1280 Main Street West / Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4L9 / email:fryecon@mcmaster.ca

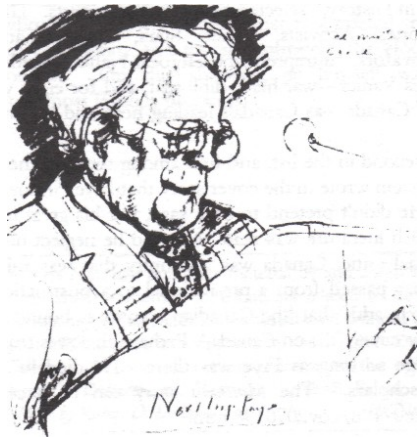
Maclean's Ranks the Famous—and the Forgotten—Who Most
Inspired the Nation

Thus reads the headline for the *Maclean's* cover story for 1 July 1998, "The 100 Most Important Canadians in History," selected by a panel of experts. The panel made its choices in ten broad categories—Activists, Artists, Stars, Thinkers and Writers, Characters, Discoverers and Innovators, Entrepreneurs, Heroes, Nation Builders, and Scientists. The panel selected Georges Vanier—war hero, diplomat, and for eight years, beginning in 1959, Governor General of Canada—as Canada's leading hero and the most important Canadian in history.

Frye ranked second in the list, and first among those in the category of Writers and Thinkers. About Frye, J.L. Granatstein wrote in the article that he "influenced everyone he taught and who read him. He didn't pretend to be a sage, but his great ideas reached around the world, wherever English literature was read. Nor did he neglect his own country. . . . To Frye, ultimately a social critic, Canada was a country that was ruled by accountants, and partly as a result it 'has passed from a pre-national to a post-national phase without ever becoming a nation.' He adds that 'the Canadian identity is bound up with the feeling that the end of the rainbow never falls on Canada.' Perhaps that was true, but the rainbow's end fell on Victoria College so long as Frye was there. He died in 1991, age 78, the most honored of Canadian scholars." The *Maclean's* story can be accessed at:<http://www.macleans.ca/newsroom07198/cov2070198.html>

Frye Conference in China

The International Symposium on Northrop Frye Studies will be held at Inner Mongolian University in Hoh-Hot, PR China, 15-17 July 1999. The symposium is sponsored by Inner Mongolia University, Victoria University, and Beijing Language and Culture University, and it is being directed by Professor Wu Chizhe, director of the Canadian Studies Center at Inner Mongolia University. A number of scholars from around the world will be presenting papers at the symposium, which, as Frye was fond of reminding us, means a drinking party. Glen Gill will report on the conference in the next issue of the Newsletter. Five summers ago the first Chinese conference on Frye took place at Peking University, the proceedings from which are recorded in the bibliography in this issue (p. 18). Professor Wu has spearheaded an effort in recent years to bring Frye's work to a larger audience in China. The Chinese version of Anatomy of Criticism, which he and others are presently translating, is scheduled for publication soon. The Critical Path and The Great Code are already available in Chinese.



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Peter Gillis (script), Allan Kuperberg (pencils)

