

Anatomy of Criticism
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957

Selected Reviews by M.H. Abrams, Hazard Adams, Robert Martin Adams, TLS reviewer, Harold Bloom, Cleanth Brooks, Kenneth Burke, Hilary Cork, David Daiches, Frank Kermode, Frederick P.W. McDowell, Eli Mandel, Thomas Vance, George Whalley. Editorial additions are in square brackets.

Additional reviews are listed at the end.

1. Abrams, M. H. “Anatomy of Criticism.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 28 (January 1959): 190–6.

Periodically since the Renaissance, important intellectual developments outside the field of literature have produced books on literary criticism—usually with words like *poetics*, *elements*, *principles*, or *science* in the title—which reformulate literary theory from first principles, in order to accommodate existing materials to the new concepts. In sixteenth-century Italy a number of treatises attempted to adjust Aristotle’s *Poetics* to the doctrines and literary forms of a Christian culture. In the mid-eighteenth century Lord Kames set out to assimilate the psychology of sensation and association to Neoclassical literary theory by ascending “to principles from facts and experiments,” in the hope by this procedure to convert the new science of mind into “the science of criticism.” Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* was the product of his persistent attempt to act as “the arbitrator between the old school and the new school,” and to bring inherited critical concepts into line with the idealism and organicism of contemporary German philosophy. Some thirty-five years ago I. A. Richards, in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, restated traditional critical ideas in terms both of the psychology of impulse and equilibrium and of the new and exciting field of semantics. Looked at in the light of these works, Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* is an attempt to resystematize the field of criticism so as to save the existing phenomena, yet to work in the implications for literary analysis of three recent and interrelated developments: depth psychology, the theories of ritual and myth in Frazer and other cultural anthropologists, and the revival of serious interest in medieval symbology.

Professor Frye has written a big, packed, compendious, and audacious book. He undertakes specifically a “science” of criticism which, following the model of the modern natural sciences, is constructed on the basis of “an inductive survey of the literary field” [7]. His aim is to achieve what criticism has always lacked, a body of knowledge which, like any genuine science, will be systematic, coherent, and progressive. This knowledge is not to be exclusive but “synoptic”; that is, it will incorporate everything that is valid in existing approaches to literature. Aristotelian poetics, aesthetic criticism, literary history and scholarship, the new criticism of text and texture, the newer criticism of myth and archetype, medieval hermeneutics—all are accepted and given their due places in a single critical system. Frye puts his claim modestly: the book consists of tentative “essays . . . on the possibility of a synoptic view” [3]. But it is clear that, however subject to refinement and expansion, these essays are conceived as a prolegomena to any future criticism. The book considers all varieties of literature, from the simplest and most “naive” to the most sophisticated and complex, and it moves from the elementary treatment of metrics and sonantal patterns, through the analysis of images and symbols, to the consideration of character types, narrative structures, and genres. Constantly it yields a freshness of insight by cross-cutting the traditional perspectives and stereotypes of criticism. It is a strikingly original achievement, of bewildering scope and complexity.

And it raises a host of questions which will provide topics of literary debate for years to come; the book will be attacked and it will be defended, but it will not be ignored. All a reviewer can do, after a preliminary reading, is to identify a few of the larger issues that it so spectacularly raises.

First is the question of the synoptic system itself. In Frye's conspectus, the field of criticism falls into a diagrammatic form with multilateral symmetries. There are, for example, five modes of criticism, in parallel with five phases of symbolism; then three kinds of archetypes, each exhibited in seven matched categories, and falling, in their narrative forms, into the four cardinal *mythoi* (comedy, romance, tragedy, and satire), arranged in a circle so that each has two neighbors and an antithetic form; furthermore, each *mythos* incorporates, *mutatis mutandis*, the same four character types, and is subdivided into six phases or species; these in turn divide neatly down the middle, three approximating ever more closely to the myth-form on the right and three to the myth-form on the left; and so on. The whole is reminiscent of the medieval encyclopedic tables designed to comprehend the *omne scibile*; instinctively, though in vain, the reader looks for an appendix that will open out into a square yard of tabular diagram.

Undeniably, systematic classification is necessary in order to make manageable any field of knowledge, and it can be charged that any classification, however indispensable, to some extent falsifies the phenomena it subsumes. The solution to this difficulty lies in keeping the system as open and flexible as possible, and in maintaining a balanced responsiveness between the categories and the data. Systems that are too elaborately symmetrical tend to keep order by tyrannizing over the unruly facts. And once you begin an intricately ordered pattern, it seeks closure by reproducing mirror images of itself: "Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother; / And half the platform just reflects the other." The danger is that when the total gridwork is completed, not only have you a place for everything but every place must have a something; and that thing automatically inherits a complex set of attributes, correspondences, clan relationships, and oppositions. In its fearful symmetry Frye's critical system repeatedly raises the question: to what extent are the inevitable sequences of repetitions, variations, parallels, and antitypes genuine discoveries, and to what extent are they artifacts of the conceptual scheme?

A second matter which is bound to become a *causa belli* is Frye's contention that evaluation must be strictly excluded from a critical theory, either in its premises or in its application to individual works of literature. His point appears to be that a science of literature, like all sciences, must be objective, that all evaluations are "subjective," an "illusion of the history of taste" [20], and that all hierarchies of literary values express concealed—and temporary—social or moral prejudices. Criticism as systematic knowledge "should show a steady advance toward indiscriminating catholicity" [25]. The critic, Frye says, finds Milton a more rewarding poet than Blackmore, but he cannot prove it. For there is a total antithesis between critical theory, which is a world of language, and the "direct experience" of a poem, which is an unmediated response of the nervous system in which "every act is unique and classification has no place" [29]. According to Frye's view, it seems, "critical evaluation" becomes a contradiction in terms.

Let it be said that there are considerable grounds for Frye's impatience with the usual role of evaluation in theory: the violent fluctuations in literary tastes and fashions; the persistent tendency to build into an ostensibly universal theory of poetry the passing preferences of a poet or a critic or an age; the projection of contemporary ethical, social, or religious prepossessions in the form of a postulated "great tradition" in literature. But Frye seems to me to put the part for the whole. Theory certainly differs from direct literary experience, but the total separation between them is, in practice, neither possible nor desirable to maintain. A well-grounded theory opens our senses to literary possibilities, and, as Coleridge said, though mediation (theory) without observation is vacuous, observation without mediation is blind. Near the beginning of his book, Frye cites the opening words of Aristotle's *Poetics* as the model for his own approach: "Our subject being poetry, I

propose to speak not only of the art in general but also of the species . . . [and] of the structure of plot required for a good poem” [14]. A *good* poem; that is, good *as* a poem, according to properly artistic criteria which are founded not on submerged moral and social premises but on the choice and order of elements required to maximize the effects the poem is designed to achieve.

At any rate, if in his own theory Frye tries to be a scientist, evaluation is always breaking through, even the kind of evaluation that implies a literary hierarchy: “Aristophanes’ . . . greatest comedy” [44], “one of the greatest masterpieces of tragic irony in literature, Plato’s *Apology*” [46], “the greatest contemporary tragedian, Racine” [221]. And ironically enough, the whole book serves, in effect, to transvaluate established literary values, by putting not only primitive but “popular” literary phenomena on an equivalence with Homer and Shakespeare as the basis for critical generalizations—including melodrama, soap operas, advertising copy, science fiction, nursery rhymes, college yells, and political cartoons.

It is safe to predict that the storm center of debate about the *Anatomy of Criticism* will be its adoption of the medieval doctrine of four-level meaning, regarded as applicable to all works of literature, no matter how literally the poet may have intended his work to be read. Some form of polysemism, indeed, is necessary to Frye’s thesis that all forms of criticism—including textual, thematic-image, and myth criticism—discover meanings that are simultaneously and objectively existent in any poem. As Frye points out, he modifies the medieval conception of the levels in order to incorporate some peculiarly modern concepts. For example, he interprets the “literal” level so as to involve the current view of the poem *qua* poem, or self-contained universe of discourse; and he translates the medieval moral and tropological level into the archetypal mode of reading, which discovers the ritual-and-myth patterns that constitute the underground of even the most sophisticated literary structures. Of the four levels, the archetypal level has the central role and is given the most prominence and space; it also raises the most basic and troublesome questions. We may take for our example Frye’s treatment of comedy. Comedy has been a notably stable literary form, and on the literal and “rhetorical” level Frye looks across standard critical concepts and classifications to make many fresh and valid literary discoveries concerning recurrent stylistic devices, situations, character types, and plot forms. He identifies, for instance, the function of “the green world” [182] in comedies such as *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *The Winter’s Tale*, in which the cruelties, conflicts, and injustices of the ordinary world are magically dissolved, all enmities reconciled, and all lovers united. Or he emphasizes, most revealingly, the importance of an organized society in comedy, and the frequency and import of the comic conclusion in a social ritual such as a wedding, a feast, or a dance. Some of these insights may have been effected or expedited by his archetypal bias, but however discovered, they are verifiable on the literal level as literary conventions, or recurrent comic elements and devices.

Then, however, Frye bids us to “stand back” [140] in order, undistracted by surface details, to discern the archetypal organization of a work—its inevitable understructure of generic shapes and its pattern of ritual action and myth. From this distance we find, for example, the shape of the Proserpine myth and its associated ritual of death and rebirth in Shakespeare’s Hero, Imogen, and Hermione, and in Spenser’s Florimel; in Esther’s Summerson’s attack of smallpox and in the shooting of Lorna Doone; eventually we discover that even Richardson’s Pamela and the Belinda of Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* are “Proserpine figures,” or archetypal earth goddesses. And at a still further remove we see that the ritual pattern of all comedies recapitulates the “mythos of spring” and the eternal rhythm of the natural cycles.

Unlike most other archetypal critics, Frye explicitly disavows the standard attempts to give a causal explanation for the recurrence of archetypes. Jung’s “collective unconscious” (in effect, a theory of inheritance of acquired mental characteristics) is “an unnecessary hypothesis” [112]; the ritual origin of dramatic forms is merely speculative history; and the archetypal patterns are not, like

conventions, dependent on the mimicry of literary originals, “however they got there” [109]. Which brings up the questions: how do we know they are there? What is the evidence for the existence of an archetype? And these take us back to Frye’s conception of a science of criticism.

The qualifications he cites for a science are coherence, inclusiveness, and the possibility of progress. Many pseudosciences, however, exhibit these attributes. Astrology, physiognomy, and the theory of humours were systematic theories that undertook to comprehend all relevant phenomena, and all showed great possibilities for development through the centuries. What seems indispensable to a genuine science is a fourth qualification: it sets out from and terminates in an appeal to facts which enforce agreement from all sane, knowledgeable, and disinterested witnesses, in independent observations. It is relevant to inquire whether Frye’s literary data do enforce agreement from all qualified readers. Are they discoverable by independent observations? Could even the initiate predict, in advance of publication, that Frye would discover “displaced” forms of the dragon-killing myth in the cave episode of *Tom Sawyer* and in the hero’s release from the labyrinth of past time in Henry James’s *The Sense of the Past*?

The concept of “displacement” is, of course, taken from Freud, and it is constructive to consider Freud’s canons of natural, or unintended, symbolic meaning, which include all the standard interpretive devices used by symbolist critics of literature. Freud’s system permits him to apply alternatively, according to circumstance, the canon of literal meaning (A is A), displacement or substitution (A is B), condensation (A is A+B+C+D . . .), and inversion or transvaluation (A is the contrary of A). It may be that such rules of reasoning are necessitated by the inherent nature of symbolism, whether in the sleeping or waking (i.e., literary) dream, but they serve incidentally to leave considerable room for logical maneuver between the Law of Contradiction and the Law of Excluded Middle. The cardinal mode of proof, however, in Freud’s theory as in all theories of natural symbolism, is analogical. The implicit canon here is that analogy justifies identification: if A is in some respects like B, then A is identifiable as B. This appears to be the standard formula of archetypal reasoning. If the stories of Hermione, Esther Summerson, Pamela, and Belinda are in some respects like the Proserpine archetype, then these stories are all instances of the Proserpine archetype (e.g., Frye, pp. 136–46).

Here it must be observed that the patterns of events in these diverse actions can be made to coincide only on a high level of abstraction, and abstraction, as Frye says in another context, implies “leaving out the inconvenient elements.” Even if we grant, in the first place, that these heroines are all Proserpine figures who act out a ritual death, when we have made that discovery, our task as practical critics has not even begun. For few works differ more radically from each other in constitution, characterization, qualitative feel, and emotional effect than do *The Winter’s Tale*, *Bleak House*, *Pamela*, and *The Rape of the Lock*, and the job of a practical critic is to account for each work in its minute particularity. But beyond this, the odd thing about evidence for an archetype is not that you cannot prove that it is present, but that you cannot help proving it, and that there is no way of disproving it. Any extended and complex literary work can, by the omission of unsuitable elements, be made to resemble almost any archetypal shape. Since there is no firm possibility of negative observations, archetypal statements are empirically incorrigible, and incorrigible statements are not good grounds for a science of criticism; one may doubt whether many archetypal statements are even, in the strict sense, significant empirical propositions. The point is perhaps implicit in Frye’s assertion that “it is not sufficient to use the text as a check on commentary,” for “the poet unconsciously meant the whole corpus of his possible commentary” [342].

Consider a parallel instance. I am not one of those who find four-leaf clovers, but my wife is. I search a bed of clover diligently for fifteen minutes without finding one, and she stoops casually down and picks two. I have to admit that, though I hadn’t seen them, the four-leaf clovers were actually there. Again: I have never noticed that the world is full of quincunxes. Then I read Sir

Thomas Browne, who points them out everywhere, and—well, yes, I have to admit that, in a way, quincunxes are actually there, too. But they are not there in the way that four-leaf clovers are there, but only in the way that circles, triangles, and dodecagons can also be shown to be there, given the prepossession and will. And so with any conceptual scheme that uses distant analogy as proof and possesses built-in expedients for universal application. The same literary work in which the archetypist discovers a seasonal myth will turn out to have a quite different pattern of subsurface meaning when analyzed by a Freudian, a Marxist, a Nietzschean, or a Hegelian critic.

As a science, accordingly, a thoroughgoing archetypal theory of literature does not resemble physics, chemistry, or biology nearly so much as it resembles alchemy. In its complete philosophical form, alchemy also relied on a universal system of correspondences among the physical, mental, moral, and divine worlds, and interpreted analogy as identity and parallelism as proof. There is further similarity in the drastic reductive tendency of both conceptual systems. On Frye's fourth, or analogical, level of reading, one poem, as I understand it, is seen to incorporate the universe: its language becomes the Logos, and its protagonist becomes all mankind, envisioned as the Man-God (pp. 115 ff.). And on the third, or archetypal, level, we find also a steady regress to unity. The individual comedy, for example, falls together with other comedies into one basic comic pattern; the comic pattern in turn plays variations on the spring mythos; the spring mythos is referred back to the vernal segment of the seasonal cycle, and eventually falls into place with romance (summer), tragedy (autumn), and irony and satire (winter) in a unitary process which is continuous, complete, and self-sufficient, and is represented by that ancient figure of perfection, the circle. Any work of literature, therefore, which to the short-sighted reader seems to have its own beginning, middle, and end, turns out in the longer view to be only a phase in a single pattern of death and rebirth whose end is always in its beginning.

Frye maintains that criticism, like science, needs such "a central hypothesis" in order to see individual phenomena "as parts of a whole" [16], and that the only cure for the endless proliferation of conflicting literary commentary is the view that "criticism has an end in the structure of literature as a total form" [342]. But the regress to one hypothetical *Urmythos* behind the multitude of individual literary phenomena does not correspond to the ever-widening generality of the sequence of physical hypotheses, from Kepler to Newton to Einstein; nor does the concept of an archetype of archetypes have the function in criticism of Einstein's unified-field theory in physics. Its function, in fact, is not scientific but metaphysical, and its relation to literary particulars is like the relation of the one to the many in Neoplatonic philosophy, in which the method of reasoning is a steady movement from the multitude of particulars back, through a progressively narrowing sequence of types, to the One or the Absolute. This yields a "certainty," indeed; but it is not the certainty of empirical proof; it is the security of an ultimate abiding place for the monistic compulsion of the human spirit.

What I have said about *Anatomy of Criticism* will be misunderstood if it is taken as an attempt to refute or disparage this notable book. My intention is rather to isolate and identify the nature of its particular achievement. On the literal level, or in its many other aspects which can be translated into literal terms, it provides as large and varied a body of critical insights as any book in recent years. Many of these can be looked upon as valid elements in a science of criticism, according to the criterion for a science which, Aristotle suggests, is the only one an educated man will apply: that it yield just so much precision and certainty as the nature of a particular subject will admit. As for the remainder, though it is not science, it is a thing no less valid or rare—it is wit, "a combination of dissimilar things, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." When we are shown that the circumstances of Pope's giddy and glittering Augustan belle have something in common with the ritual assault on a nature goddess, that Henry James's most elaborate and sophisticated social novels share attributes with barbaric folk tales, and that the ritual expulsion of

the *pharmakos*, or scapegoat, is manifested alike in Plato's *Apology*, in *The Mikado*, and in the treatment of an umpire in a baseball game, we feel that shock of delighted surprise which is the effect and index of wit. Such criticism is animating; though only so, it should be added, when conducted with Frye's special *brio*, and when it manifests a mind that, like his, is deft, resourceful, and richly stored. An intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilars, Aristotle notes, is a sign of genius and cannot be learned from others. Wit criticism, like poetic wit, is dangerous, because to fall short of the highest is to fail dismally, and to succeed, it must be managed by a Truewit and not by a Witwoud.

Professor Frye argues eloquently that the theory and practice of literary criticism is a humanistic and liberal pursuit; and one of the functions of both criticism and a liberal culture, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, is a free and disinterested play of mind. The *Anatomy of Criticism* is a remarkable instance of that free and delightful play of ideas around literature which has always been a distinction of the urbane and civilized mind.

2. Adams, Hazard. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (June 1958): 533–4.

In his treatment of Enlightenment aesthetics, Ernst Cassirer wrote that aestheticians who contributed to the foundation of aesthetic systems in the eighteenth century were not aware of the goal toward which they were steering: "In the clash of various tendencies a really consistent line of reasoning, a conscious orientation to a definitely conceived fundamental pattern is nowhere to be found." In spite of the wealth of critical and aesthetic speculation in the twentieth century, the same words might be applied to our era. After two more centuries of embarrassing riches, it is not surprising that aesthetics and criticism—especially, I think, literary study—appear to many as somewhat undignified vocations. . . . In some cases the very possibility of aesthetics has been denied, and criticism has been judged fruitless, barren, sterile. No matter what metaphor one chooses from the cluster, it is difficult to be original.

For several years now, Professor Northrop Frye . . . has been battling against a sea of critical ennui which threatens either to engulf us all or to drive us shorewards to the deserts of "appreciation." Now, having collected and greatly revised and enlarged many of his previous essays, he has presented the outlines of (he carefully implies that they are suggestions *toward*) a systematic approach to literary criticism. To those of us who began reading Frye's work with his study of William Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*, and continued to read his essays as they appeared, the present book is an event of real importance and excitement. It could be seen some time ago that Frye was evolving a far-reaching theory of criticism (indeed, it was implied in the Blake book and could almost be called neo-Blakean), but the scope of the system, its complexity and flexibility, has been revealed only in the *Anatomy* itself. It would be impossible to attempt here a full description of the argument presented, but a brief commentary upon Frye's defense of criticism as a systematic endeavor will indicate the assumptions upon which he begins to construct a theory. In his "Polemical Introduction" (I shall resist the impulse to quote practically all of it) Frye argues that the only alternative to futility in criticism is to adopt the belief "that scholars and public critics are directly related by an intermediate form of criticism, a coherent and comprehensive theory of literature, logically and scientifically organized, some of which the student unconsciously learns as he goes on, but the main principles of which are yet unknown to us" [11]. Lest certain humanitarians object for emotional reasons to the use of the term "scientific" as it is applied here, let me hasten to add that Frye anticipates the objection. He suggests that these readers substitute "systematic" or "progressive." He wants these terms to indicate that criticism can be an organized structure of learning, the principles of which are to be inductively derived from literature itself.

The failure of criticism has stemmed in part, writes Frye, from a confusion about what the practice of criticism really is. A student should learn criticism, not literature, just as a student learns physics, not nature: “The difficulty often felt in ‘teaching literature’ arises from the fact that it cannot be done: the criticism of literature is all that can be directly taught. Literature is not a subject of study but an object of study” [11]. The main difficulty of criticism now, he writes, is that it languishes in a state from which the physical sciences liberated themselves some time ago. The phenomena are still regarded as constituting the framework of the subject; there is no structure of criticism itself.

Proceeding from these remarks, Frye relegates a variety of value judgments to the history of taste, arguing that criticism is not interested in such matters. Thus he clears the field of much rubbish. I should like to see him write further on the problem of value, enlarging upon the argument he presents in the *Anatomy*. At present his stand is that although we know the difference between “redeemable” and “irredeemable” art, we cannot ever formulate the difference theoretically. If this is so, some value judgments must not be examples of mere taste; only their expression is. We do know the difference between good and bad, and there must be some way we know. And the way we know might be described, even though specific efforts at evaluation might remain merely assertions. I am not particularly worried about this dilemma, however, as far as it concerns this book. The system which Frye presents leads us as close as criticism probably can to a grasp, if not a formulation, of value. . . .

Frye tells us that his book began as a study of Spenser, became a study of allegory, and finally resolved itself into an “anatomy of criticism.” I, for one, am grateful for its evolution. I hope that it will be read in the right places. But I have faint regrets too that Frye did not stop for a while with Spenser. Perhaps he will return now and rescue that good poet from the varioriums. A book of “practical” criticism following upon the *Anatomy* would be of great value. *Fearful Symmetry*, which is in a way such a book, derives its method from Blake himself. Writing on another poet, Frye would be free to derive his method from his own neo-Blakean system. Like *Fearful Symmetry*, the *Anatomy* is a continuously exciting book. Arguing for science, Professor Frye shows criticism can be pursued with dignity and art.

3. Adams, Robert Martin. “Dreadful Symmetry.” *Hudson Review* 10 (Winter 1957–1958): 614–19.

How much of an autonomous discipline is literary criticism? Is it in fact a “field” intermediary between philosophy and history, as the existence of “English” and “literature” departments on university tables of organization suggests? Or should the criticism of literature scale itself to the criticism of plastic art and the criticism of music—activities of evident value in themselves, but frankly subordinate to the disciplines they serve? In other words, does literary criticism need a conceptual universe of its own? Professor Northrop Frye has written a brilliantly suggestive and encyclopedically erudite book to prove that it does; and he has done his impressive best to provide a framework for this universe. His book is a signal achievement; it is tight, hard, paradoxical, and genuinely witty. It encounters in the present reviewer one who is perfectly skeptical of the value or possibility of a conceptual universe for literary criticism.

So far as “criticism” is taken to include literary history, categorization, and description (i.e., the disciplines customarily subsumed under the head of “philology”), this dim and negative view must be modified. Description, categorical and historical, is certainly possible, and can be done much better than it has yet been done. Professor Frye has some exciting and splendid ideas of how to do it. His account of literary genres and literary themes is admirably fresh in its conception and

fully worked-out in its details. There is some unnecessary embroidery on it; but one does not have to identify comedy with spring, romance with summer, tragedy with autumn, irony with winter, to see that these are four modes of dealing with experience under which a good deal of literature, subliterate, and general human feeling can be arranged. If one wishes to predicate a central unifying myth for all four modes, Professor Frye with a slight readjustment will provide one, with *agon* as the basis for romance, *pathos* as the theme of tragedy, *sparagmos* as the type of irony and satire, and *anagnorisis* as the essence of comedy. But this again is a frill for one's lamb-chop, and optional; Professor Frye's best description goes in the more specific direction, when he undertakes to show the themes which typically are associated with these four major forms, and which contribute to make the different varieties of them different. Here he is simply brilliant in his command of the material; and I have no impulse to oh-come-now even his consideration of Poe's Gold Bug as an epiphany analogous to Jack's beanstalk, Jacob's ladder, a Pisgah-sight of Palestine, Spenser's Garden of Adonis, or Virginia Woolf's lighthouse. If we take it as patent that existing literary categories are shambling and inadequate, and if categories based on themes are proposed as substitutes, they must take account of the themes wherever they appear. Professor Frye would not much disturb me if he introduced Mr. Capp's vision of Upper and Lower Slobbovia as a "symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment" [203]. In fact, he would be absurd if he refused to admit, not only Lil Abner and Orphan Annie, but Sexy Stories, singing commercials, and the Ford Salesman's Handbook into his categories. A theme is a theme.

Thus the categories as described undoubtedly exist, and exist generally enough to enclose significant bodies of material; indeed, they can be extended or complicated to the point where they become absurd or cumbersome without altering their basic descriptive value. They are not always as easy to apply as Professor Frye's brevity leads him to suggest. He distinguishes, for example, four varieties of comic characters (everything runs in fours in this book), the *alazons* or impostors, the *eirons* or self-deprecators, the *bomolochoi* or buffoons, and the *agroikoi* or churls. Taking a comic character at random, I find that Andrew Undershaft, in *Major Barbara*, can, according to the episode one selects, be described as all four of these. In the same way, by selecting various episodes and aspects of character, I have noted no less than 25 archetypal originals for Fabrizio del Dongo, not counting either Oedipus or Christ. None of them have anything whatever to do with making the *Charterhouse* the sort of novel it is, but they certainly do exist. I cannot tell how one prevents this novel from falling into 25 different categories. Once again, this sort of fact does not impeach the existence of the categories, it only limits their usefulness.

But Professor Frye's critical machinery is limited primarily by its remoteness from anything like a scheme of values. Once or twice he slips; and, in describing a hypothetical romance in which the hero, returning from a quest, flings off beggar's rags and stands forth in a scarlet cloak, goes so far as to say that "the solar analogy explains why the hero's act is an effective and conventional incident" [188]. Begging Professor Frye's pardon, the analogy with solar myth does nothing of the sort. The act is conventional because many other authors have imagined acts like it; why they did so, neither Professor Frye nor I really know. We certainly cannot invoke the concept of archetype, defined "a symbol which recurs frequently," to provide an antecedent reason why certain symbols recur frequently. As for effectiveness—but how do we know that this hypothetical romance is effective at all?—I will propose another one, the most ineffective romance ever written, or one too dreadful to be written at all, in which the hero goes through this same by-play with beggar's rags and scarlet cloak. Does the solar analogy explain its ineffectiveness?

No, no, this is the old trick of archetypal critics; arguing that because a ritual was known to the Samoyeds and Telugu, an analogue to it makes *Paradise Lost* a great poem. Professor Frye is too wise to indulge in such recondite claptrap. His footnote knows better than his text; and goes on to

point out that “archetypal criticism, which can do nothing but abstract and typify and reduce to convention, has only a ‘subconscious’ role in the direct experience of literature, where uniqueness is everything” [361]. I would add that it often has only a “subconscious” relation to the literary materials from which it pretends to derive; and that its “central expanding pattern of systematic comprehension” [12] often appears to exist only by virtue of its remoteness from many of the facts it pretends to comprehend.

Professor Frye seems to feel that his present volume needs, to complement it, another one concerned with practical criticism. I shall read it with the greatest pleasure, for the extraordinary individual qualities of mind which it will undoubtedly display. Professor Frye is one of the strangest and most interesting literary minds in existence; like a whirling dervish, he incorporates somehow a Thomistic rigor, a prophetic vigor, and the diabolical persuasiveness of the Ancient Mariner. Unlike most of the archetypal fellows, he has a sense of literary structure and discipline; unlike most of the disciplined fellows, he has a burnished and brilliant imagination. Sometimes sheer exuberance leads him into relatively empty paradoxes; for example, his argument might have stood well enough without a demonstration that musical poetry is perforce cacophonous (one of the underlying impulses here was no doubt an “unconscious” numerological preference for the four-beat line as the basic English meter.) Still, he is the most exciting critic around; I do not think he is capable of writing a page which does not offer some sort of intellectual reward.

And yet his work seems to me wholly unsound—not merely overextended in this detail or that, but engaged, like a good deal of other contemporary criticism, on a search for conceptual unity at a level that can lead only to exaggerated, strained, and confused interpretations of literary fact. To argue the point at length is clearly beyond the scope of a review. But I can suggest something of the argument by a brief analogy with a sister-discipline, that of history. The historians as I see them are not much bothered with the business of developing a conceptual universe of their own. Not that they are, God forbid, in a state of blissful universal agreement. On the contrary, they suffer from as many conflicting categories, as frantic a lack of adequate terminology, and just as many incompatible schools of interpretation as does literary criticism. Yet they have relatively few misgivings about their procedures and a total lack of that sense of academic encirclement which seems to haunt Professor Frye. Happy in their traditional *Lebensraum*, they seem content to live with no loftier common principle than a general mutual regard for the rules of historical evidence. Their condition is not Utopian; they still have a few crackpots who will try to tell them what history as a whole is all about; and I myself think they would do well to formulate into something more distinct than a gentleman’s agreement the rules of the game they are playing. But I think, as their approach is essentially modest, it provides access to most truths possessed of a vigorous dimension and a reasonable resistance to the wintry eye of skepticism. The hectic flush of the enthusiast, if it is not subdued entirely, at least knows approximately what standards it must meet to be accepted as a healthy intellectual complexion.

Professor Frye’s *Anatomy* implies in its title a certain devotion to the bare bones, the minimum essentials of criticism. By conservative standards, it is a rococo skeleton indeed—not without a certain Ronald-Searles charm, by virtue of its intellectual flourishes and curlicues, but about as stripped and quintessential as the Albert Memorial. An important crux is provided by Professor Frye’s discussion of “The Anagogic Mode: The Symbol as Monad”; and it is a pity that he has based his account of this mode of literary understanding on nothing more than the assertion that we must predicate it if the rest of his system is not to appear meaningless [118]. This is not a very good argument to the uncommitted reader. Supporting quotations from Blake and Hooker might serve to tack down the anagogic mode if Blake and Hooker were unquestioned authorities, and if the quotations did not unfortunately contain or imply multiple contradictions of themselves and of one another. (Infinity as such is not a place where the process of man’s desire can rest contented;

the infinite, whatever else it is, is not necessarily an order; and the fact that infinite order can be imagined is no evidence that it exists, except as centaurs, phoenixes, and unicorns also exist.)

Finally, I confess to a total inability to follow the higher reaches of Professor Frye's anagogic thought. How is the argument that literature is a total form helped by the observation that all men understand what food is? Noises, noses, and excretion are all universal too, but don't help me much to envision a total shape for literature. Even if all men understand what food is, and so make food a "central symbol," i.e., a lowest common denominator of human experience, what does it mean to say that "Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way" [119]? As an explanation of literature, this set of considerations seems to demand some pretty elaborate explanations of its own. I do not, by any means, think it wrong to believe in "the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate" [119]; but I think it wrong to make such a belief prerequisite to the understanding of literature. My own conviction is that the world rests on the back of a very large tortoise.

In fact, Professor Frye is afflicted with a will to believe which overflows into a will to see in literature as many elements as possible. It is odd to note how his acute and flexible mind turns back from any argument that would have the effect of eliminating a pattern or subordinating an element in the design. At one point he argues that there are many things in a musical score which reveal themselves to study and are therefore no less real than those melodic outlines which one can hear in the concert-hall [85-86]. This is undeniable. The brush-strokes and the undercoating on a canvas (which can be seen by infrared cameras and microscopes) are no less real than the design and the color. But to be aware of them is no essential part of "seeing the picture" and may even be a distinct (I will not say "incompatible") way of seeing it.

Rejecting as he does all varieties of the "intentional heresy," and unwilling as he is to develop any substitutes, Professor Frye seems to me singularly deficient in devices for straining the junk out of literature. Presumably he does not feel it to be junk. But this is precisely the mark of "scientific" thought (or progressive thought, or coherent, orderly thinking of any sort)—its ability to separate the attractively irrelevant, and possibly even true, observation, from that which is in fact operative. It is the pattern of evaluative criticism (in the traditional sense) to shuttle back and forth, trying to show what elements in the literary work cause it to have precisely the effect it does have, and what effect it should have by virtue of the elements which are demonstrably in it. But there is a rational check on the operative elements one sees in a literary work; they are distinctive elements precisely as they have distinctive effects. And an effect is legitimized to the degree that it can be traced to a distinct and proportionate cause. Professor Frye provides no such system of checks and balances, at least in the present volume; and no basis on which to separate the archetypal theme which muddles or vulgarizes its work of art from that which fulfills it. Conceivably this will be the work of his next volume; he might have calmed many anxieties by making the promise explicit. His present book remains, in its own right, a stimulating and agile production, which will have served many purposes, direct and indirect, even if it does not provoke, as one hopes, an equally alert and somewhat more sober consideration of the rules of literary evidence. . . .

4. Anonymous. "Literary Dissection." *TLS*, 14 February 1958: 1-2.

The amount of intellectual energy devoted by our age to criticism of the arts is a phenomenon that any future historian of culture will have to consider. For literature, obvious evidence appears in the size of the new supplement to the *Cambridge Bibliography* covering the work of the past twenty-five years. Much of this is of course American, and every serious student of literature must acknowledge

not only the sheer amount and variety of the transatlantic contribution but also the weight and importance of its best examples. It often seems to be distinguished from English criticism by a more energetic thoroughness, a readier willingness to take up new ideas and approaches, to follow them through all their implications, and to work out controversial clashes in public debate, and a quicker responsiveness to the possibilities of cross-fertilization from other disciplines. In recent years it has been possible to see some shift of interest from practical criticism and critical method to wider and more general questions of principles and theory. The Chicago Aristotelians constitute one formidable example, but even in 1949 the study by Professor Wellek and Professor Warren showed something of this trend.

A concern with these wider issues has seldom been carried so far as in the latest book by Professor Northrop Frye, of Toronto. . . .

[To summarize Frye's four "theories"] inevitably exaggerates the appearance of arid schematizing, but it must be confessed that Mr. Frye's classifications, with their sequences and cycles, often seem to embody something of that "fearful symmetry" which was his theme in an earlier work. Frequently the reader has an uneasy feeling that a given category may exist to complete a scheme or provide a correspondence rather than fill a real need in handling the data. Moreover, the working out of such an elaborate "conceptual framework" leaves no opportunity to demonstrate its necessity or its use in any extended application. The apparent eccentricities of the theoretical schemes are balanced, it is true, by a number of stimulating suggestions and comments thrown out in the course of the argument, and it would give a false impression not to acknowledge that Mr. Frye often shows a strong vein of underlying common sense. He has an impressive range of reference in classical and modern literatures, and the discussion is enlivened by a wealth of unusual examples. Mr. Frye never pursues any of his theories with the rigidity of, say, the Chicago Aristotelians.

He is adept at sidestepping apparent dilemmas and avoiding all deterministic traps, and he has no use for reductive theories of any kind. He steers well away from what has come to be known as the intentional fallacy, and he resists all attempts to limit the meaning of a work to that of which the author's contemporaries were conscious. He is insistent that a poet's thought cannot be abstracted from his work and considered by itself: it matters as part of the poetry. Among the topics of which his treatment is particularly interesting are the conventions and stock characters of comedy, the "associative process" characteristic of the lyric, and the proper use of the term "musical" as applied to poetry. From this last discussion Spenser, Pope, Keats, and Tennyson emerge as the *unmusical* poets, developing a smooth pattern of sound rather than a cumulative rhythm: this admits to the "musical" category the poets of greater rhythmic individuality who are often those more knowledgeable about actual music. There is something to be said for the proposal to separate off from the novel certain special categories of fiction—the "romance," the "confession," and the "anatomy"—and the concluding discussion of "the literary aspect of verbal structures generally called non-literary" [326] has an interest out of all proportion to its length.

The livelier parts of this book, however, are incidental, and obstinate doubts remain about the general undertaking. Mr. Frye does not regard his schemes as in any sense final, merely the indications of the kind of "study of the formal causes of art" [29] that he thinks desirable. But he fails to persuade us of the value of any discussion of literature taken so far in the realm of pure theory, especially as his argument quickens in interest precisely at those points where it relates more closely to specific perceptions. His preface says that a complementary volume concerned with practical criticism may be needed, "a sort of morphology of literary symbolism" [vii], but there is more to it than this. What is wanted is the constant check of experience, a reassurance that theory is not developing on its own and becoming an end in itself, a presentation of the personal apprehensions which provide the data for theory to organize.

But this, of course, is to part company with Mr. Frye in the middle of his “Polemical Introduction,” where he asserts that the theorist of literature and the consumer are “not the same at all, even when they co-exist in the same man” [20]. “Criticism as knowledge” is rigidly distinguished from “value-judgements informed by taste” [28], or practice in the direct experience of literature. The distinction is made easier by what appears to be a rather over-simple notion of the process of judgment. . . .

Mr. Frye makes too little allowance for the pervasive part played by judgments of value in all critical perception, wherever questions arise concerning emphasis or relevance. It may be doubted, in fact, how far there really can exist any pure “criticism as knowledge” of the kind postulated here. But that need not leave us, as Mr. Frye seems to think, with a study “too relative and subjective ever to make consistent sense” [18]. It may, of course, involve the admission that the critic is often led to a point where he must go beyond the boundary of his own field and invoke social and moral values. But there are more or less intelligent ways of doing this: Mr. Frye’s examples of the concealed “ultra-critical joker” in all “selective approaches to tradition” [23] have too much of caricature to form a cogent argument, and he dismisses Arnold and his touchstones altogether too easily. To many it will seem that the peculiar critical discipline—a disinterested striving for relevance in response and for sensitive determination for what is actually there in the work contemplated—is essentially one involving judgments of value, one that calls into play the finest powers of discrimination developed in the reader’s experience of life as well as literature, and that only upon this basis can any valid general theory be constructed.

5. Bloom, Harold. “A New Poetics.” *Yale Review* 47 (September 1957): 130–3.

In 1947 Frye published *Fearful Symmetry*, the definitive study of William Blake. Contrapuntal myth-making, the creative mode of Blake’s prophetic epics, *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, suggested to Frye the possibility of an iconography of the imagination, a grammar of literary symbolism that would identify “the conception of the Classical in art and the conception of the scriptural or canonical in religion” [420]. The four essays of Frye’s *Anatomy* constitute such an attempt at pure critical theory, a trial summary of ten years’ labor by an imagination whose power and discipline are unique in contemporary criticism.

Frye’s aim is necessarily to present “a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism” [3]. A Polemical Introduction and a Tentative Conclusion set forth and defend this aim; the four essays, in between, systematically map out the “hypothetical verbal structure” [245] of literary criticism as an autonomous humanistic discipline.

In this ambitious enterprise Frye is the legitimate heir of Ruskin as against Arnold, for like Ruskin he seeks to construct “a conceptual framework which belongs to the critic alone” [9] and yet relates itself to the literary object of study alone. The vision of the unity and autonomy of the arts and the necessity of interpreting them without the aid of “deterministic” extra-artistic beliefs are from Ruskin; the procedure, which is *both* empirical and *a priori*, is from Blake’s dialectic. Frye’s basing the structure of criticism upon a total experience of literature is empirical; his conviction that the ultimate acts of apprehension are mathematical or mythical belongs to the Platonic tradition. As mathematics gives coherence to the natural sciences without itself being dependent upon them or any other external support, so literature informs the verbal structures of theology, philosophy, history, depth psychology, or of any discipline that must be created out of language. Like mathematics, literature is self-contained; both postulate hypothetical universes which are inimical to the discursive antithesis of being and non-being. They present us with the symbol as anagoge: a total order of reality exists and does not exist beyond the total order of words or signs.

For Frye, criticism is a body of knowledge which can be made exact and progressive though not predictive (thus marking its limits as science). Frye's essays are therefore deliberately schematic, though the schematic form itself is always tentative. In consequence, Frye's theoretical grammar, though it omits all specific, practical criticism (tentatively promised us as a later, complementary volume, a morphology of literary symbolism), is a handbook of literature as well as of criticism. The major value of Frye's *Anatomy* is constructive; a poetics which is complete, sane, and honestly discursive, based as it is upon an inductive survey of the whole of literature, has at least been offered us. The minor value is descriptive, and equally relevant: a clear introduction to the structural principles of literature is now available. In this last aspect Frye's *Anatomy* manifests a healthy resemblance to Tovey's *Encyclopaedia Britannica* articles on "technique and aesthetics of music" recently reprinted in this country as *The Forms of Music*. Like Tovey, Frye has given a rational account of the structural principles of a Western art in the context of its heritage, classical and Christian in the case of literature. Unlike Tovey, Frye has had to work alone, for the primitive science of literary criticism, still in its state of naive induction, has not yet got round to the naming of parts. As opposed to music criticism this primitive science is of course a highly developed art, but academics possessing such peculiar artistry are as frightful teachers of it as any classroom poet attempting to instruct his nests of bare ruined choirs. Frye sensibly remarks that one cannot *teach* literature, only criticism, and to teach one needs a coherent vocabulary. . . .

The notion of a *conceptual* rhetoric is central in Frye, and defines his position among contemporary critical theorists. He assigns no place of privilege to dialectic over rhetoric, resembling in this the phenomenologist who denies physical science its traditionally privileged position in the structure of knowledge. Blake's quarrel with the discursive reason was that it had a tendency to limit creativity by establishing unnecessary categorical distinctions, "cloven fictions." Frye, who should be truer to Blake, is trying, perhaps too hard, to be a reconciler, not a quarreler, and does not war against the denigrators of rhetoric as much as he should. He absorbs the New Critics where he should reject them, for their discursive reduction of rhetoric into irony, their refusal to apprehend polysemous meanings in consciously modulated contexts, mark them as his natural and immediate enemy. The desire to be synoptic betrays Frye into a denial of real differences between almost all fashionable criticism and his own theories. His very great book, which will be widely read and used, but mostly by critics under forty, will not much affect the dogmatism of the now Middle-aged Criticism.

6. Brooks, Cleanth. *Christian Scholar* 41 (June 1958): 169–73.

Someone has recently remarked that criticism is at the moment the most cluttered and untidy of all the intellectual disciplines. The fact that ours has been an age of intense and often fruitful critical activity has made confusion inevitable. The more casual reader may be forgiven for sometimes thinking that the noises he hears emanating from the worksite of the house of criticism are actually incident to the building of a tower of Babel.

The attempts to tidy up the scene began some time ago. The standard work that orders and relates the various modes of literary study was (and, in your reviewer's opinion, remains) *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren. But Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* is the most ambitious and indeed the most impressive attempt at a synthesis of the various literary disciplines. Frye has read, one is inclined to say, just about everything, including the comparative religionists, Freud, Jung, and the other depth psychologists, the anthropologists, philosophers like Cassirer and Langer and the other experts on symbolism, all the critics, and, what is very much to the purpose here, everybody who has contributed to Anglo-American literature from Beowulf to James Joyce.

The encyclopedic character of the book does not, however, make it solemn and portentous. It is lively, ingenious, and frequently very daringly argued. But since *Anatomy of Criticism* aspires to sketch out a complete system of literary scholarship, one has to expect the highly elaborate system of classification that goes with such a total scholarship. The four essays that constitute the book have to do with historical, ethical, archetypal, and rhetorical criticism. But to cite these titles is only to hint at the complexity of organization. For the four essays induct us into the theory of “modes,” “symbols,” “myths,” and “genres,” and—to take only one of these—the theory of the symbol involves “Literal and Descriptive Phases: Symbol as Motif and Sign”; “Formal Phase: Symbol as Image”; “Mythical Phase: Symbol as Archetype”; and “Anagogic Phase: Symbol as Monad.” Thus, as the term “anagogic” suggests, Dante’s four kinds of poetic meaning join Aristotle’s six aspects of tragedy (plot, character, thought, melody, diction, and spectacle), not to mention clusters of other terms developed from the time of Aristotle to that of Empson, in order to provide the elaborate terminology required to deal with the great manifold of notions which Frye sets before us.

Frye’s tidying-up process does not mean to leave us with a room empty, swept, and garnished save for the furniture that he himself has put into it. On the contrary, all the present furnishings are to be retained but neatly arranged in proper order. Frye aims at a “synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism” [3]. He does not mean to attack any “methods of criticism.” What his book does attack is “the barriers between the methods. These barriers tend to make a critic confine himself to a single method of criticism, which is unnecessary, and they tend to make him establish his primary contacts, not with other critics, but with subjects outside criticism” [341].

As the last phrase indicates, Frye is zealous to preserve the autonomy of “criticism” (that is, the general study of literature) and yet to vindicate such study as a civilizing force and one which will help us build a society of a special kind, “free, classless, urbane” [347]. Whether his *Anatomy of Criticism* actually escapes the embarrassments of every other scheme which would make literature autonomous and at the same time fruitful for the human enterprise, I am not so sure. Those of us who emphasize the autonomy of literature usually end by being charged with asserting an irresponsible aestheticism. Frye’s present effort seems to me to run the opposite risk of setting up the study of literature as a kind of substitute for religion, though Frye, to be sure, makes his disclaimers on this head.

The place that the “new criticism” is made to assume in Frye’s scheme will throw some light on his aims and methods. Frye would prefer to call this variety of criticism “rhetorical criticism.” I am not altogether happy about the substituted term, but it certainly represents an improvement on the vague and misleading adjective “new.” At any rate, since this kind of criticism has had its prominence in our time, Frye adverts to it again and again.

Some of his comments represent acute and perceptive judgments: “The critics who tell us that the basis of poetic expression is irony, or a pattern of words that turn away from obvious . . . meaning, are much closer to the facts of literary experience” [81]. “Thus the metaphor turns its back on ordinary descriptive meaning, and presents a structure which really is ironic and paradoxical” [123]. But in other passages he seems to acquiesce in the view that “rhetorical criticism” is preoccupied with mere detail and has no concern for the larger structures [140]. At any rate, Frye would add to what he regards as its characteristic focus a concern for plot and action; to its focus on the literary artifact, a concern for history and biography; and to its stress on the unique work, a concern for literary conventions and genres. If a person of my critical sympathies has been inclined to take this kind of filling out and completion for granted, there is, it must be admitted, something to be said for spelling it out. And if one means by “criticism,” as Frye does, the total concern for the literary process, then much which one has subsumed under the varieties of scholarship must be fitted into an “anatomy” of criticism. (With regard to the general relation of

“new” or rhetorical criticism to genre theory, it will be interesting to the reader to turn back to what Wellek and Warren said on the subject some ten years ago in their *Theory of Literature*.)

Frye’s ambition is to develop criticism in the direction of a science, a kind of “social science,” and in accord with this view, he consistently plays down value judgments as incorrigibly subjective and really unnecessary. He is surely right in distinguishing the history of taste and criticism proper. He is right again in pointing out how frequently our prejudices and ethical judgments dominate our value judgments in literature. But ought criticism to “show a steady advance toward indiscriminating catholicity” [25]? If the study of literature is developed toward a social science, can it ever become a “value-free” social science, and, if so, is it desirable that it should become such? I could wish that Frye had developed this point more fully and more clearly. He does write that “the critic will find soon, and constantly, that Milton is a more rewarding and suggestive poet to work with than Blackmore” [25]. But substitute other names, and the issue is not so clear. And if the issue in this instance is clear, could not one ground the judgment in something objective? Frye uses the obvious superiority of Milton to Blackmore to suggest that one won’t want to waste time “in belaboring the point.” Blackmore is certainly a very small lion and one that is much too dead to waste bullets on. But there is plenty of live game: there are discriminations to be made and presumably worth making. A criticism that finds it beneath its purposes to “criticize” has moved far toward a neutral and “scientific” scholarship.

Though Frye has insisted that he merely wishes to relate *all* the various kinds of criticism to each other, it is his treatment of archetypal criticism that gives the special character to his book. Certainly it is of archetypal imagery that he writes with most zest and brilliance, and in his general ordering of the various disciplines archetypal criticism is assigned a very special role. Indeed, Frye gives first importance to archetypal criticism in the task of breaking down the barriers that separate the various kinds of criticism.

The subtitle of his section on archetypal criticism is called “Theory of Myths.” Frye finds that there are four narrative categories: the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric. These he associates with the four seasons of the year. Romance, for example, is the mythos of summer. In romance there is something of the wish-fulfillment dream—there is a persistent nostalgia for some kind of golden age. The complete form of romance is the successful quest. In the completed quest can be discerned three main stages: the perilous journey, the crucial struggle, and the exaltation of the hero. . . .

How complex Frye’s complete scheme is becomes plain when we remember that the *mythoi* of the full four seasons will yield some twenty-four phases. But Frye’s resourcefulness is equal to the demands put upon it. He is bright, perceptive, nearly always plausible, and quite frequently convincing as he manipulates these subcategories. Indeed, Frye resembles nothing so much as the scientist filling out Mendeleev’s table, predicting from the vacant place in the table the properties of the element to be discovered and assigning a descriptive name to it. For example, in his theory of genres, one can find Frye saying, “Our next step is evidently to discover a fourth form of fiction. . . . which is extroverted and intellectual” [308]. This turns out to be the “Menippean satire,” striking examples of which are to be found in *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Water-Babies*. Indeed, one of the most useful things about Frye’s book is that he does devise or refabricate new genres that the literary critic is indeed in need of. Moreover, by establishing so many intermediate points between his various genres (and various myths, for that matter), Frye does much to take the curse off of the rigidities of genre criticism. The demarcations between the classes become not much more than useful points of orientation, the family groupings that often prove illuminating, and the shading can be made so minute as to allow one to deal with the actual contours of the work in question.

What such criticism as this ultimately comes to, it seems to me, is a classification of the various kinds of literary “materials”—of the various possible narrative sequences, patterns of action,

themes, psychological clusterings, etc. Long before Sir James Frazer and Freud and Jung, men had noticed the resemblances between the myths of the gods and the basic plot situations and general patterns through which the human mind functions—and even made some attempts to relate them to literary types. (A striking anticipation of Frye’s combined classification occurs in the seventeenth century with Thomas Hobbes’ combining three levels of “matter,” court, town, country, with two modes of presentation, dramatic and narrative, to produce six genres.) To say this, of course, is not to belittle the truly great achievements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in cultural anthropology, comparative religion, the theory of symbolism, and depth psychology. Our age has learned enormously from these fields. That we can never learn enough to do without a criticism that makes evaluative judgment, I doubt very much. The ultimate difficulty of archetypal criticism is that it cannot tell us the difference between a good work and a bad, since an inferior novel, for example, may on occasion make use of the richest archetypal material and yet remain an inferior piece of art. This is the point that Jung has already made: *Moby Dick* is a great novel and Rider Haggard’s *She* is not, but they both incorporate archetypal material. Indeed, what literary work does not? Insofar as Frye has really classified all the possibilities of narrative structure, all the varieties of the hero, all the symbolic progressions, it will be impossible for any fictional product of the human mind not to find its proper pigeon-hole.

But to enter these reservations does not alter the fact that *Anatomy of Criticism* is indeed a remarkable book. The author’s incidental critical judgments, it ought to be stressed, are frequently brilliant. He is not merely a system builder but a critic of real power. But he is certainly a most resourceful system builder. And the system itself, considered simply as an intellectual feat—a critical *tour de force*—is astonishing. One predicts that *Anatomy of Criticism* will have an emphatic impact upon our literary studies, and, for good or ill, will exert a continued influence.

7. Burke, Kenneth. “The Encyclopaedic, Two Kinds of.” *Poetry* 91 (February 1958): 320–8.

... The archetype does seem to be the generative principle of [Frye’s] four essays. And apparently his belief in it is what provides the ground for his other perceptions, which come thick and fast, and are often quite unusual in themselves, and are brilliantly put.

I would do Mr. Frye a disservice if I attempted here, in brief space, to give a summary of his four essays. His analysis of modes, symbols, myths, and genres is complicated by subdivision into themes, phases, imagery, *mythoi*, rhythms, forms (with even spring, summer, autumn, and winter brought in to throw a suggestive semi-Spenglerian light on comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony or satire, respectively), all these being in turn further subdivided and crossed with other terms. I cannot lay claim to having yet made myself at home in his nomenclature. Matters are still more complicated by the fact that, being what he himself calls a “terminological buccaneer” [362], he frequently uses traditional words in a sense peculiarly his own. However, though such special usages may add somewhat to your discomfiture when you are first trying to find your way around in Mr. Frye’s rich reticulation of variously interrelated terms, they also help to give the *Anatomy* the liveliness of an exceptional personality. With this author, new slants on things come easy, urgently, with a rush—and the best policy for the reader is to relax and enjoy them. . . .

All told, though he would introduce a classical concern with literary genres, his classifications are so manifold, and so like a sliding scale rather than a fixed system of differentiation, they suggest somewhat the sort of thing that happened with Schoenberg in music when he expanded the principle of modulation, making it so ubiquitous and constant that it could become hardly distinguishable from no modulation at all. Here is a good example of his shadings: “Romance, therefore, is characterized by the acceptance of pity and fear, which in ordinary life relate to pain, as forms of pleasure. It turns fear at a distance, or terror, into the adventurous; fear at contact, or

horror, into the marvellous, and fear without an object, or dread (*Angst*) into a pensive melancholy. It turns pity at a distance, or concern, into the theme of chivalrous rescue; pity at contact, or tenderness, into a languid and relaxed charm, and pity without an object (which has no name but is a kind of animism, or treating everything in nature as though it had human feelings) into creative fantasy" [37].

Everywhere we turn, from whatever point of view the author happens to be dividing up the literary realm, we encounter things thus shading into one another. Hence, "the center of the literary universe is whatever we happen to be reading" [121]. Such a flower-in-the-crannied-wall position culminates in what he calls, somewhat redundantly, "apocalyptic revelation." Or, as he puts it elsewhere: "Anagogically, then, poetry unites total ritual, or social action, and total dream, or unlimited individual thought. Its universe is infinite and boundless hypothesis: it cannot be contained within any actual civilization or set of moral values, for the same reason that no structure of imagery can be restricted to one allegorical interpretation. Here the *dianoia* of art is . . . the Logos, the shaping word which is both reason and, as Goethe's Faust speculated, *praxis* or creative act. The *ethos* of art is no longer a group of characters within a natural setting, but a universal man who is also a divine being conceived in anthropomorphic terms" [120].

Presumably Mr. Frye's notion of the anagogic, as a poetic analogue of the all-enfolding Logos, would amount to a kind of lyrical transcendence, an idealistically mythic (or "archetypal") view of everything as contained within an over-arching or all-encompassing Monas Monadum, in a scheme that would be a post-Leibnitzian, post-Hegelian reclamation of Neo-Platonism. It culminates in his notion of the quest-myth as the archetype of archetypes. And thus, like the "monomyth" school generally, he stops his generalizing at the point where he might, by just one more step, end with a dialectic of purely abstract design (if, for instance, he went from "quest" to some such notion as "transformation" or "development" in general).

[In *Literary Criticism: A Short History*] Messrs. Wimsatt and Brooks raise against Mr. Frye's position an objection that, in one form or another, they raise against many: "The inert and valueless 'document' will submit to the kind of classification that Frye specifies just as well as a valuable poem." And, as he indicates in his "Polemical Introduction," Mr. Frye would agree with them, though without feeling at all down-hearted: "Value-judgements are subjective in the sense that they can be indirectly but not directly communicated. When they are fashionable or generally accepted, they look objective, but that is all. . . [20].

Value-judgments, says Mr. Frye, are necessarily circular, ultimately reducible to ways of saying: "'all plays that have unity of action must have unity of action,' or, more simply and more commonly, 'all good plays must be good plays'" [26]. So there! And meanwhile, Mr. Frye will persist in his frenzy, or orgy, of rheostatic classifying.

8. Corke, Hilary. "Sweeping the Interpreter's House." *Encounter* 10 (Feb. 1958): 79–82.

I must confess to having contemplated the 350 unopened pages of *Anatomy of Criticism* with a sigh. Presumably another fatty from an American university press in which long and well-gone-over ground is given another going-over just the same, and the well-languaged works of those who could write is quizzed by a non-writer in language that is not. "Close analysis": tabloid synopsis (the plot of the *Faerie Queene*; *Ulysses* or *Little by Little*): jejune stricture and juvenile dicta. . . .

Never was a sigh so quickly, firmly and definitely un-sighed. It is always frightening to jump, but I *will* jump and say that Professor Frye's book seems to me to be one of the very few important critical productions of my time. Its influence, I suppose, will almost inevitably be gradual, but is likely to prove eventually one of those turning-points of which no art or science can expect to boast more than two or three or four in century.

Anatomy of Criticism falls into two sections. The first, a mere thirty pages, is destructive. Professor Frye takes practically the whole of contemporary criticism and perfectly coolly and ironically, with the apparent casualness of absolute assurance and expertise, tips it down the sink. . . . But this polemical excursus is nevertheless the least important part of the *Anatomy of Criticism*. Criticism, Professor Frye considers, has hardly even begun to get down to its business seriously. It has not yet even acquired a vocabulary with which to think, being thus in much the same state as philosophy was long, long ago when its terms meant whatever anyone wanted them to mean. What sort of use, for example, is the word *novel*, when it has to cover everything from *Gulliver's Travels* to *Finnegans Wake*. How can we talk about poems with simply the two words, *epic* for pretty long poems, and *lyric* for pretty short ones? Are not most of our comments bound from the start to be "devoid of content"? Professor Frye's heroic attempt is to provide this vocabulary. He considers the whole body of literature and essays to systematise it, advancing in an exploratory manner upon four fronts: classification by Theory of Modes, by Theory of Symbols, by Theory of Myth, and Theory of Genres. . . .

The task is naturally gigantic and too weighty for the shoulders of any single man. Nevertheless, Professor Frye's powers of systematization are of an altogether extraordinary kind, the kind that, while providing perfectly definite and applicable and mutually excluding criteria, succeeds astonishingly not in killing the subject of the dissection off but in bringing it startlingly and freshly alive. Lesser men would therefore, I think, be wise in accepting Professor Frye's terminology for the time being as it stands, in introducing his categories and specialized vocabulary into their own writings whenever occasion dictates, and in leaving it to the course of the years to dictate whatever subtractions and additions may later seem necessary. They will at least be helping the art of criticism to take its first positive step forward (on the theoretical side) from where Aristotle left it.

But are they likely to, these lesser men? Alas, I think not, and the more lesser the less likely. They have been spinning round on their own tails for too long, and what they will above all hate in the *Anatomy of Criticism* is that, concerning itself with the neglected fundamentals of vocabulary, definition, verbal and logical discipline, it is above all immensely *practical*—and I do *not* mean in the sense of Professor I. A. Richards *Practical Criticism*, which is extremely well in its place but about as practical in the wider sense as a "practical man" is (the sort who can make an attractive and ornamental book-rest out of a couple of old orange boxes) in the context of nuclear physics. Poor critics have always avoided the practical. That is why a hundred books a year are published about "poets" and their "poetry" to only one about poetry itself—metric, rhetoric, form: the whole body of creative thought and activity by which and in which every one of those poets moved and had his being. It is also why the average literary man has to kid himself that his "disciplines" are finer than those of the average scientist, whereas the scientist just hasn't to kid himself at all. He knows. And Professor Frye knows. The question is, how many literary gentlemen will have the grace and courage to get up off their tails and join them.

9. Daiches, David. *Modern Philology* 56 (August 1958): 69–72.

This is a brilliant and provocative book—brilliant because it is an original, learned, and witty introduction to "a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism" [3], the product of fresh and hard thinking; provocative because its classifications, categories, terminology, and encyclopedic cross-referencing constitute a challenge to all modern ways of thinking about criticism known to this reviewer. The reasoning is close and cogent; the illustrations startlingly apt, once they have been adduced, though never occurring to the reader until they have been; the scheme tightly knit and worked out with an almost scholastic finesse of categorization. To

review adequately a book of this kind; to present, discuss, and weight its arguments; to examine its implications; to estimate the degree to which it really does achieve the synoptic view it is striving toward and consider the advantages of such a view would require considerably more space than the book itself. All that can be done here is to give some indication of Mr. Frye's approach, manner, and habit of mind and to try to give some general evaluation of his achievement.

Criticism for Mr. Frye is knowledge and not opinion; it has nothing to do with taste and seems to have little to do with evaluation. . . . The critic needs his own conceptual universe, in which, qua critic, he ought to dwell. This universe can be built up progressively; criticism progresses in the way science progresses; indeed, criticism, Mr. Frye insists more than once, *is* a science. The whole approach here is strenuously Aristotelian. "A theory of criticism whose principles apply to the whole of literature and account for every type of valid critical procedure is what I think Aristotle meant by poetics" [14]. But what do we—or Mr. Frye—mean by "account for"? Critical principles which "account for" every "valid" critical procedure must contain in themselves the reasons for one's procedures being valid and another invalid; procedures which your critical principles cannot account for become automatically invalid. There seems to be some circularity here. Mr. Frye's method is to reduce literature to elements out of which any given kind of literature can be built up. "In this book we are attempting to outline a few of the grammatical rudiments of literary expression, and the elements of it that correspond to such musical elements as tonality, simple and compound rhythm, canonical imitation, and the like" [133]. Criticism becomes a technique of description by categorization and (in spite of Mr. Frye's disclaimers) reduction. Different kinds of literature differ in the kind, proportion, combination, and manner of employment of their different elements. Mr. Frye is fascinating in his categorization of the elements and his classifications of their possible permutations and combinations. Ultimately, however, such a method is bound to be reductive, subsuming different works in a class, defining by showing the *kind*, not the *quiddity*; always pointing to what a given work has in common with others rather than revealing its special differentiating qualities. The immediate response to a given work of art is of no more importance than the immediate response of an observer to, say, a star would be to an astronomer. The astronomer relates his observation to a coherent set of astronomical facts and principles, and similarly the literary critic, who must begin as the scientist does with "the assumption of total coherence" [16], moves as quickly as he can from the individual literary phenomenon to a body of knowledge and ideas to which he wishes to relate it and in the light of which he can see it "critically." Thus criticism is comparative not in the sense that it is concerned with comparing some works with others and saying *this* is better or worse than *that*, but in the sense that it places a given work in a context, by defining its mode, its kind and degree of symbolization, the kind of archetypal themes and images it employs, the way it handles words with respect to a real or implied audience or to the writer's relationship to his material. This inevitably makes it "like" other works (and, of course, unlike still other works), and in the demonstration of this lies the critical act. . . .

But Mr. Frye makes distinctions as well; indeed, his whole schematic procedure is based on distinctions, the establishment of modes and kinds, within which each work is fitted. . . . Mr. Frye is forced to develop a critical vocabulary of his own, often wrenching Aristotelian and other Greek terms to his own purpose. This sometimes gives a pedantic flavor to his discourse which belies the real tenor of his argument.

The weight of the whole book rests on the discussion of archetypal criticism, and in his "Tentative Conclusion" Mr. Frye explains that, in the necessary process of breaking down barriers between methods, archetypal criticism has a central role. His purpose is not "to suggest a new program for critics, but a new perspective on their existing programs, which in themselves are valid enough" [341]. It is, in fact, an outline of a critical *Summa*. It contains much that may annoy or even infuriate any given reader, and some things appear to this reviewer as arrant nonsense. (An example

of the latter: “In England the romances of Scott and, in less degree, the Brontés, are part of a mysterious Northumbrian renaissance, a Romantic reaction against the new industrialism of the Midlands, which also produced the poetry of Wordsworth and Burns and the philosophy of Carlyle” [306]—a thoroughly misleading collocation.) The main defect of this work is the degree of reduction to which Mr. Frye’s method inevitably leads him: Burns and Carlyle are not similar in any significant respect. But it is a courageous, stimulating, and genuinely thoughtful work, and no one who reads it will be able to think of literature or of criticism in quite the same way again. It is the rare kind of book that the reader must come to terms with, even if it takes him the rest of his life.

10. Kermode, Frank. *Review of English Studies* 10 (August 1959): 317–23.

For this extraordinary book, as for how few works of critical theory, one confidently predicts long life. It is wonderfully well written, and has such momentum that to disagree with it is almost physically painful, though very necessary. It has almost no repose, but makes up for that by being full of seemingly inevitable wit that comes only of great intelligence—a little, if one seeks a comparison, like Shaw. And somewhat hidden, driving the book along, is a demon every bit as queer as metabiology. Only by standards by which Professor Frye would not accept does it fall short of greatness in its kind: first, if it were widely accepted it would have no influence upon the course of literature itself, and the highest criticism has; secondly, it fails, or refuses, to convey anything of what might be called the personal presence of any of the thousands of works discussed.

The reasons for these shortcomings is not the author’s incapacity but his devotion to duty. He deals with literature in terms of a specific conceptual framework derived from an inductive study of literature, hoping thus to avoid the “fallacy of determinism” exhibited in Freudian or Marxist criticism; and he is therefore conscious of his descent from Aristotle, as well as of the analogies between his critical method and the sciences, particularly physics in its mathematical phase. Literature he treats as a second nature, vast, inexhaustible, and anonymous; as physics studies nature, criticism studies art. But if it is to be a progressive science like physics, criticism needs to be developed systematically; that this has never been done is most easily seen from the fantastic deficiency of the critical vocabulary, a deficiency which the author labors fantastically to supply. As literature grew more and more complex, critical systematization declined, whereas the primitive formulations of physics gave way to complex mathematical symbolism. Instead of concluding, as I should, that the physics-criticism breaks down here, Mr. Frye proceeds to invent a quasi-mathematical critical system. But if science and art are alike Symbolic Forms (which Mr. Frye at least in part believes), a criticism which objectifies art is a strange parasite, as if one were to invent a nonmathematical way of presenting mathematics. However, the author is committed to finding some central hypothesis which will allow one to treat criticism as totally coherent, and concerned with the phenomena of art as parts of a whole; to do for criticism what Darwin did for biology. Of the prescientific prejudices which have first to be exploded, two stand out: first, the “fallacy of premature teleology”—the notion that the critic’s task is to get out of a work what the author put in, which corresponds, in the natural sciences, to the belief that a phenomenon is as it is because Providence inscrutably made it so. Secondly, value judgments must go; the assault on them is very lively, but Mr. Frye admits that Milton is a more valuable poet than Blackmore, a fatal concession one would have thought, since it is not nobler to study stars than worms.

Between the Polemical Introduction (which is all I have so far considered) and the Tentative Conclusion stand the four enormous essays which chart and classify the world of literature. It is like some strange unknown forest, where the trees grow in groups of four, five, six, or seven, and which is divided into four sections, with balancing subsections, the numerological groups constantly re-

echoing each other; ultimately the author reaches the heart of the wood, and finds what he knew was there, a central myth, inconceivably diversified throughout the body of literature. I have tried but failed to find some way of abridging the scheme of these essays, and in what follows there is much distortion as well as omission. I have also emphasized the points which seem to me to show the degree to which the book suffers, in its own way, from the fallacy of determinism; this being so, it is only fair to repeat at this point that the text is often brilliant with wit and penetrating in observation.

The First Essay (“Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes”) classifies fictions by the degree to which their heroes are *spoudaios* or *phaulos*. (Mr. Frye, in the modern American manner, transliterates all his Greek.) This yields five “modes” of fiction, stretching from the hero as god to the hero as the reader’s inferior (irony). European fiction has gravitated from the first to the last of these modes, from myth to romance, to tragedy and epic (the “high mimetic” modes), and to comedy and irony (the “low mimetic” modes). In each mode there is to be distinguished a “naive” and a “sentimental” form (these terms are not used in their normal, nor yet quite in Schiller’s, sense, but a glossary is provided, very necessary if one remembers that the class of hero called *alazon* includes Madame Bovary, Lord Jim, Heathcliff, and Othello, whereas the *pharmakos* class includes Hester Prynne, Billy Budd, Tess, and, one supposes, Mr. Waugh’s heroes. This is very exercising. Who is the *alazon* in *Emma*, Mr. Elton or Emma herself? Is Lucky Jim an *alazon* or a *pharmakos* or possibly an *eiron*? Is he comic or ironic?) Frye goes on to study the tragic and comic modes systematically, as demonstrating the tension between *mimesis* and *mythos*; in relation to the latter, the question to ask about *Tom Jones* or *Oliver Twist* is what their relations are with the birth-mystery plots of Menander, and with myths like those of Moses and Perseus.

The most valuable part of this First Essay deals with “Thematic Modes” and is a sort of extension of the Aristotelian *dianoia*. This is concerned not with the question, “How is this story going to turn out?”, which relates to plot, and specifically to *anagnorisis*; but with the question “What’s the point of this story?” No work of fiction is totally fictional, none is totally thematic; but any work can have a bias one way or the other, as titles like *The History of Tom Jones* and *Sense and Sensibility* indicate. As in fiction the author imposes mythical form on life, so in “thematic” writing he imposes literary form on thought. He does not *imitate* thought; to suppose that he does is to risk the fallacy of “existential projection”—arguing back from the poem’s theme the author’s thought. The “thought” that all thematic poetry projects—as Spenser projects Platonism and Goethe “organicism”—is not the poet’s “philosophy”; and this is true whether this thought is theologically or philosophically conventional or self-generated, as in Blake or Shelley. In placing this “as if” before all poetic “thought,” Frye is as true to the broadly Symbolist view of literature as he was in declaring all works of art to be anonymous, placing precisely the same difficulties of interpretation before their own authors as they do before independent critics.

Even from this very inadequate account it should be clear that the book is deeply concerned with mythical and thematic recurrence in literature, and hence with the schematization of the multitudinous ways in which the recurrent may be embodied. The Second Essay, which is called “Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols,” assumes as a fact of literary experience the principle of “polysemous meaning,” adopts the four-level Dantesque system of interpretation (though denying that one level is more valuable than another), and seeks not a sequence of meanings so much as contexts in which the work of art can be placed, each context having its own *dianoia*, *mythos*, and *ethos*.

Literary meaning is always “hypothetical” or “imaginative”; questions of fact or truth are subordinate to the primary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake. Wherever we have an autonomous verbal structure of this kind we have literature. (This is again Symbolist; by “hypothetical” Frye means what Mrs. Langer means by “virtual,” and this is not far, though the

approach is so different, from I. A. Richards's "pseudo-." Indeed, this passage is a conspicuous clue to where we are going; for not only is "autonomy" a reverend Symbolist concept, but the assertion of the discontinuity of literature from assertive thinking supports the parallel with mathematics, and suggests allegiance to the latest manifestations of Symbolist aesthetics, the neo-Kantianism of Cassirer's Symbolic Forms. Thus, what is called "discursive thinking" is ruinous to literature because it interferes with its "centripetality"; this is so whether the thought is of God or how to grow hops. I find some confusion in the argument here because I do not see why the poet, who can say so much without affirming anything, must be held to have chosen "centrifugal material" if he speaks of theology, simply because theology can be called tautological, whereas he can use jokes and puns and even myths which have not been existentially projected into dogma. Behind all this is the old Symbolist regret that words are used for other purposes than to make poems.) A consequence of this principle of autonomy is that the medieval "literal" acquires a new sense; since a poem cannot be literally anything but a poem, what Dante thought of as the "literal" meaning is in fact an "allegorical" meaning, though a simple prose paraphrase. (This is attractive, because it removes the ground of the quarrel between those who contend, with Mr. Winters, that any good poem must have a paraphrasable meaning, and those who anathematize paraphrase; for Mr. Frye they are simply talking about two different phases of the poem's existence. The "literal" meaning, in his sense, is nearly what Professor Wilson Knight calls the "spatial" interpretation. We listen to the poem, but we *see* what it means; we have a simultaneous apprehension of the whole, towards which all the words point, inwards. This "hypothetical verbal structure" [245] is the literal meaning. Frye duly acknowledges that nobody before Mallarmé, could have supposed this. From it follow a number of familiar consequences: thought in a poem is "virtual thinking," the intention of the poet is only what is definitively described in his text, poetry is always ironical because it never means what it says. Nor, in the nature of the case, is there any possible limit to commentary; we can talk about a poem, as about a tulip, forever, always *explicating* (see Hulme and Bergson), or, as Frye prefers to say, *allegorizing*.)

But, if we must refrain from existential projections, there are nevertheless ways of talking about the work, however autonomous, in a context, the context of literary forms as a whole. On the assumption that "literature shapes itself, and is not shaped externally" [97], Frye proposes a new theory of genres. (Even here, though the author regrets that we are less clear about genre than Milton was when he set down to write *Lycidas*, there is no escape from Symbolism. Frye will not allow that the poet is the "father" of his poem; that would be to confuse a literary with a discursive verbal structure. He is only the midwife, or womb. This striking passage on p. 98 is, perhaps deliberately, an allegorization of Mallarmé's sonnet, "Don du poëme.") In fact this is a theory of archetypes, mythic patterns inductively ascertained from a study of the *secunda natura*, art, regardless of whether the artist was conscious of employing them. These archetypes are so important to Frye's system that they must be distinguished from other hypotheses that go under the same name: they are not Jungian. They are a necessary corollary of the doctrine that the forms in which a poet organizes his work come out of poetry, not life. Their presence has nothing to do with value, and Frye deliberately draws many examples from cheap and superficial literature. They are quite distinct from Miss Bodkin's archetypes, because Frye is concerned only with the fact of recurrence, though to explain that recurrence it is necessary to descend to the primitive mythical level of seasonal recurrence and rebirth. In fact the archetypes provide the link between literature and life which makes literature an ethical instrument "without any temptation to dispose of the arts in the process" [115]. As an ethical instrument, art is "disinterested and liberal" [115], proper to culture as distinct from civilization. Archetypes are therefore the agents which enable the fifth (or as Dante would have said, the fourth or anagogical) level of meaning; for at the heart of the archetypes there are "universal symbols." Literature in this phase becomes "the total dream of man" [119], not imitating

but *containing* nature; and the poem is a microcosm, a monad containing life in a system of verbal relationships; it is the “epiphany” of Joyce, the “inscape” of Hopkins. (Frye knows well that this is Symbolist; like Pound, he identifies metaphor, one of these relationships, as juxtaposition without predicate, which is the ideographic version of the Romantic and Symbolist image. I cannot do justice to this second essay, but it is fair to say that its structure, however weird it looks, is a considerable intellectual achievement, being nothing less than the adaptation of an Aristotelian scheme to a Symbolist view of literature.)

The Third Essay (“Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths”) fully expounds the implications of these archetypes, and in doing so takes us to the heart of the wood, where we find the central hypothesis; it reminds one of Frazer’s treatment of the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, except that Frazer puts this at the beginning of his book and Frye, appropriately since he holds that the quest-romance underlies all literature, seeks it through strange landscapes. If one regards myth as one pole, and naturalism as the other, of literary design, a theory of *displacement* will account for the degree to which the mythical pattern is obscured, in any given work, by the demands of plausibility. Undisplaced myth is about gods and demons, heaven and hell, and may be divided into apocalyptic and demonic; at the other extreme realism plays down myth as far as possible. But the process is circular, and ironic literature, which starts from realism, tends to turn into undisplaced myth. (The circularity of Frye’s diagrams is one aspect I have had to neglect. This passage on “displacement” is both central and subtle, though it must be said that its main purpose is to lower the author into myth, where all the answers are ultimately to be found. It sometimes appears that the answers to all literary problems must at present be primitivistic, and this book is, under one aspect, an immense structure of primitivizing devices, extremely sophisticated.) A general “Theory of Mythos,” isolating seven types or categories of images, follows. Basically there are four pre-generic narrative elements in literature: Spring-Comedy, Summer-Romance, Autumn-Tragedy, Winter-Irony or Satire. Here, on the primitivistic bedrock, we find the cleverest and most sophisticated part of the book, far too complicated to summarize, abounding with brilliant critical observation, and a perfect riot of terminological innovation. (For example, the *viron* type, otherwise the vice or the Golux, includes Leporello, Jeeves, and Ariel; the *agroikos* Malvolio, Jaques, Bertram, Caliban, and Manly. Speaking of tragedy, Mr. Frye throws out the idea, new to me, that the two great periods of tragedy correspond to the rise of Ionian and Renaissance science, which may help us to understand his point that all good tragedy leads up to “an epiphany of law” [208].) The book seems to me to be particularly good on tragedy, which it treats as a part of a total quest-myth of which the other pregeneric mythoi are constituents. Tragedy is itself divided into six phases, of which the last is set in a world of shock and horror (*Oedipus Tyrannus*), with central images of *sparagmos*; and this last phase shades into pure demonic epiphany (*Inferno*).

For all its brilliance, this essay does not pretend to take us very far, and having mastered it one is still left without an answer to very elementary questions. For example: everybody can see that *Othello*, *Otello*, and Cinthio’s bloody little story are very different (even if we leave out of consideration that two of the works are sublime masterpieces and the third is not), but so far Frye has only taught us clever ways of saying how they resemble each other; for his account of the position of *Othello* in the world of literature will serve without alteration for the other two works also. The Fourth Essay (“Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres”), though abstaining from judgments of value, provides some criteria for making the necessary distinctions.

It opens with a flurry of triads, stemming from Aristotle’s *melos*, *lexis*, and *opsis*, but settles down to a study of the *radical of presentation* as the differentia of genre (the radical of *epos*, as opposed to epic, is oral address; of *fiction*, the printed address to the reader. These two genres are flanked by drama and lyric.) In connection with *epos*, Frye studies the rhythm of oral verse, and finds the four-stress line to be inherent in the structure of English. Considering *melos*, he defines “musical poetry”

as poetry resembling the music contemporary with it, and having a predominating stress accent with free variation of the number of syllables between stresses. (Browning is a musical poet, Tennyson not.) *Opsis* is considered as imitative harmony, and the palm for this goes to Spenser, which is odder than many other things in this chapter, of which space absolutely forbids me to say more.

In his "Tentative Conclusion" the author insists on the utility of "archetypal criticism" in breaking down the barriers between different critical methods. The mythic core of literature invites infinite explanation and allegorization; but so long as this effort is confined to individual works, we have chaos, as in *Hamlet* criticism. Archetypal criticism ends chaos, because "things become more hopeful as soon as there is a feeling . . . that criticism has an end in the structure of literature as a total form, as well as beginning in the text studied" [342]. But this is not all; Frye now sets his theory in a wider context. He rejects as fallacious all doctrines of cultural decline, but equally rejects all possibility of development in the arts; the best that can be done has already been done, though it may be repeated. What can be steadily improved is the understanding of the arts; and so the critic's task is associated with the ultimate purposes of civilization. In this way art, though without morality, is an ethical instrument, neo-Arnoldian and with a quite different interpretation of *spoudaios*. Finally, the analogy between criticism and mathematics becomes explicit. Literature and mathematics proceed not from facts but from postulates; both can be applied to external reality and also exist in a "pure" form, &c. For Plato, the ultimate acts of apprehension were mythical or mathematical, and Frye says much the same thing. To remake "the broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept" [354]—which Frye conceives to be the work of criticism—is, in the end, an attempt to understand that art is a symbolic form, like language, myth, and science. Once more we are in the domain of Cassirer; for all his immense originality, Frye is in some ways a less original critic than, say, Mr. Yvor Winters.

I have indicated in passing some of the elements of what may intelligibly be called "Symbolist" doctrine in this book, and they add up to a total impressive enough to indicate that its author wrote it with much less freedom from prejudice than he supposed. A poem is an anonymous and autonomous verbal structure; literal meaning cannot be rendered in other words; literary form is spatial; the intention is defined in the text. Add to these beliefs a highly developed organicism, a primitivism which arrives at myth through archetype, and, though rejecting the hypothesis of Mr. Barfield, accepts those of Cassirer and Mrs. Langer; and you have the latest extraordinary development of Symbolist criticism. Perhaps the need for mythology has never been so richly expressed; yet this, like any other "sentimental" revival of myth, is an ironical comment on the society which calls for it. I myself believe, with Mr. Forster, that one may "introduce mysticism at the wrong stage of the affair"; for example, the doctrine of anonymity is a mystical doctrine, which serves to explain why St. John of the Cross or Dante were no better than they were at interpreting their own poems, but does not explain how severe must be the technical process by which Proust or Mr. Eliot or Mr. Forster reproduce, with eyes wide open, the relation between what Mr. Frye calls *Augenblick* and the ordinary business of living. It is very unfortunate that he has not yet allowed himself to study, in terms of his diagram, one single work of art.

Everything in the book points downwards, to preconscious ritual, which is the necessary base of the structure. Mr. Frye's primitivism differs from that of less literary aestheticians in two ways: first, he is enormously well acquainted with literature; secondly, he is fascinated by ornamental design. The book sometimes looks like the work of an apocalyptic numerologist with a flair for Greek, and its threes, fours, fives, sixes, and sevens have a curiously *centripetal* effect; so has its general design, in which one can detect a *peripeteia* and finally, in the confrontation of mathematics by literature, a *cognito*. If I were allowed to be diagrammatic, I should call *Anatomy of Criticism* a work of sixth-phase Symbolism placed on the frontier of a purer Aristotelianism. Certainly it would be reasonable to treat this as a work of criticism which has turned into literature, for it is centripetal,

autonomous, and ethical without, I think, being useful. As literature it has, if I may be permitted to say so, great value; and if this judgment seems to lack support in what I have said, I am perfectly content that this notice be regarded as a hideous example of *sparagmos*.

11. McDowell, Frederick P. W. "After the New Criticism." *Western Review* 22 (Summer 1958): 309–14.

Mr. Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* may become as seminal for the next decade as the pronouncements of Eliot, Pound, and Richards were for the 1920s and 1930s, and the Brooks and Warren textbooks and Ransom's *The New Criticism* for the 1930s and 1940s. Mr. Frye starts from what is most valid in recent criticism, its insistence that the work of art has independent existence and significance. In his discussion "Symbol as Archetype," he contends that events and ideas used by the writer at best "are hypothetical imitations of history and discursive writing respectively" [113]; an emancipation, therefore, occurs, from "externality into image, nature into art" [113]. Since its essence is hypothetical, art cannot be directly descriptive of something nor related causally "to any other system of phenomena, standards, values, or final causes" outside itself [113]. Mr. Frye would agree with Allen Tate, for example, that literature has value precisely because it is, in its own right, a dynamic, self-consistent, self-contained vehicle for the knowledge that most concerns us as spiritually perceptive human beings.

Criticism, Mr. Frye maintains, is also an independent discipline which relates literature to a specific conceptual framework. What that framework might become he attempts to specify in his book. By inductive means, he says, the primary postulates of criticism can be defined; eventually there will emerge "a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism" [3]. In a desire to exemplify in practice a similar sense of the importance of literature itself, the critic will see his chief aim as the dispensing of insight, and he will strive for catholicity and sympathy. In the process of evaluation, he will be concerned with the positive excellence or genuineness of a work, not his own preferences: "Such criticism produces the direct value judgment of informed good taste, the proving of art on the pulses, the disciplined response of a highly organized nervous system to the impact of poetry" [27]. From his desire to redeem from the present as much literature as possible, the critic will inevitably become, in part, ethical, humanistic, liberal in emphasis.

Mr. Frye's fictional categories become familiar through his constant use of them; and they may soon gain currency in practical criticism. Yet it is not quite clear just where in literary history certain modes cease to dominate and others begin. It is not clear, for example, whether the high mimetic or the low mimetic is the mode most characteristic of the eighteenth century. Mr. Frye richly illustrates his discourse by references to works from the whole of literature. His penetrating comments on specific books do much, in fact, to make his own treatise so stimulating. . . .

The provocative nature of Mr. Frye's discourse may be suggested by . . . his theory of symbols. To some degree, however, Mr. Frye reveals in his work the defects of his great virtues. His ingeniousness at some points becomes a categorizing overingeniousness; and in his enthusiasm for the archetypal he tends to become inevitably somewhat one-sided in his approach to literature, despite the manifold intonations of meaning which he elicits from literature through his own use of his method. Mr. Frye, it seems to me, places finally too great a conceptual burden upon the symbols of a literary work, and he also defines symbol too rigorously. He assumes that symbols are the primary element of literary structure; so far we may perhaps agree, but other elements are of greater importance than Mr. Frye admits in his book. In an extended work, the purely physical organization or design and the psychological and conceptual relationships which obtain among the characters are

often crucial. Sometimes, too, the modulations of idea at a fairly abstract level partially organize a literary work—statement and theme, in their own right, become as important as their figurative elaboration or their symbolic projection. In works which imitate a relatively simple order of reality, symbol and image may be subordinate to the total impact or “felt reality” of the recreated experience.

In defining the symbol as “any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention,” [71] usually a word, a phrase, or an image, Mr. Frye apparently neglects the fact that in narrative art the characters may themselves be symbolic (see the characters in Chekhov’s plays) and that incidents in which they are involved have sometimes fuller symbolic meaning than the recurring images. In *Howard’s End*, for example, Forster throughout uses the wych elm and the “goblin football” in the Fifth Symphony as symbolic images; yet Helen Schlegel’s encounters with Leonard Bast and the incident of the destruction of Ruth Wilcox’s will by her family are, I think, more symbolically illuminating.

In his discussion of symbol, Mr. Frye illustrates his remarks copiously and thoughtfully with examples drawn from fiction and drama; yet his illustrations impress me as being too often in abstraction from the total structure and meaning of the work he may be referring to. Formally and conceptually, literature has a broader base even than the symbolic one which Mr. Frye recognizes; his statement that “the structural principles of literature . . . are to be derived from archetypal and anagogic criticism” [134] strikes me as being unduly restrictive. His discussion of symbol also seems to me more immediately relevant to poetry than to other genres.

Despite any such reservations we may have, Mr. Frye’s ideas, in general, are tenable. We can agree, then, that both archetypal and anagogic methods of criticism are valuable, since they emphasize “a larger context of literature as a whole” [134] and since they assume that literature is an expression of universal human significance. Both methods of criticism look to the rest of literature, they look beyond it, and then they look back to the work of art itself. . . .

Mr. Frye is sounder in his more general discussion than when he attempts to fill in the details of his theoretical structure. His lucid style enables him to communicate easily in the abstract even when his materials are complex and refractory. What difficulty does exist in communication undoubtedly derives from the intractable nature of Mr. Frye’s subject and from the subtlety of his mind. . . .

When it seems . . . that Mr. Frye is becoming esoteric or too specialized, he redresses the balance with a brilliant discussion like that on the specific forms of prose fiction, a discussion so clear and forceful as to say almost the last word on a perplexing subject. In this regard, he has been bothered, as we all must have been, by the flatulent inclusiveness of “novel” as a literary term. He does away with much confusion by distinguishing between the novel and romance, viewing the novel as extroverted and personal, interested in a more subjective manner in its characters. He discriminates between two other fictional forms, impersonal in nature, the confession which is introverted and intellectualized in content, and the Menippean satire (or anatomy) which is extroverted and intellectualized in content, with stylized instead of naturalistic characters. In instances such as this when Mr. Frye speaks most authoritatively, it is to be assumed that critics will immediately make use of the terminology which he has provided for them. In other instances, a further testing at the theoretical and practical levels of the various categories which he suggests may be needed before the terminology can win general acceptance.

From brooding long on the theory of literature, Mr. Frye says much of importance on matters which have previously been inadequately expounded. Perhaps his originality can best be illustrated by brief mention of three illuminating discussions: on aestheticism versus moralism in art, on music in literature, and on tragedy. With respect to the artist’s self-conscious aestheticism Mr. Frye declares that the pursuit of beauty as an end in itself results in an “exaggerated cult of style,”

which make all things sound alike “and like the author at his most impressive” [115]; the writer becomes egocentric and loses an honest pride in honest craftsmanship. On the other hand, if poetry is finally characterized by morality and truth (as well as by beauty), the poet ought not to try to achieve these qualities directly, Mr. Frye insists, but to try for “inner verbal strength” [113]. Again, a misplaced egotism will divert the artist from his proper task if he tries to be a moralist rather than an honest craftsman.

In his discussion of the distinctive rhythms underlying literature, Frye establishes conclusively, it seems to me, that music in prose or verse is a matter of stress, not of imitative verbal harmony. Thus, the clearly accented but harsh and rugged poem is more musical than poems in which the musical stress is relaxed. Poets like Spenser, Tennyson, and Keats, usually considered to be “musical,” are in reality closer to visual art—to the rendition of *opsis* or spectacle rather than *melos* or music.

In his remarks on tragedy, Mr. Frye is at his most provocative. He specifically warns against two reductive formulas: (1) that all tragedy illustrates the power of external fate over human destiny and (2) that the act responsible for the tragedy must represent primarily a breaking of moral law. Mr. Frye finds the distinctive characteristic of tragedy to be the restricting of a relatively free existence “into a process of causation,” the tragic discovery being “the determined shape of the life he has created for himself, with an implicit comparison with the uncreated potential life he has forsaken. . . . On one side of the tragic hero is an opportunity for freedom, on the other, the inevitable consequence of losing that freedom” [212–13]. The essence of tragedy is thus a movement toward the “crucial moment from which point the road to what will be can be simultaneously seen” [213].

Anatomy of Criticism resists being held in the mind all at once, so that the book’s usefulness may only gradually become apparent as Mr. Frye and other critics demonstrate the value of its insights. It is destined, I think, to become a book constantly referred to, at least as a point of departure for literary discourse if not always for universal agreement. Looking back over the critical movement of the last thirty years, one can see that its life has been supplied by such synoptic and germinal books as Mr. Frye’s. The work of Pound, Eliot, Richards, and Ransom has been mentioned; one thinks also of Brooks’s *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, Burke’s *The Philosophy of Literary Forms*, Fergusson’s *The Idea of a Theater*, Krieger’s *The New Apologists for Poetry*, Wellek and Warren’s *Theory of Literature*, and Wellek’s *A History of Modern Criticism*. It is Mr. Frye’s distinction that his book, in many ways, goes deeper than any of these. . . . Mr. Frye has written a reference work that also conclusively displays an artist’s sense of organization and style. His own book, in short, supports his assertion in his “Polemical Introduction” that criticism is an art. *Anatomy of Criticism* is of permanent value to the critic and to the student of literature; one is, on all counts, immensely grateful for it.

12. Mandel, E. W. “Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*.” *Canadian Forum* 38 (September 1958): 128–9.

In trouble throughout most of its history as one of the arts of Western civilization, poetry has always needed beside itself the art of its defenders. Dumb itself, it has won its spokesmen, and sly Plato, indifferent Locke, and ironic Peacock have provoked spectacular passions in defense. But it now appears that this delicate relationship between the offended and the defender needs to be clarified, and the articulate, contemptuous art of criticism itself needs spokesmen. It has found in Professor Frye a particularly able and eloquent one. Among the increasing number of essays on literary theory, Professor Frye’s is especially distinguished by its point of view, the angle or height from which he

views his subject: a defense or justification of criticism, not as the nursemaid of wicked or dull-witted poetry, or as “sonorous nonsense,” but as a coherent and systematic study, a systematic structure of knowledge. His *Anatomy of Criticism* proposes nothing less than to give reasons for believing in “a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism” and “to provide a tentative version of it” [3]. Professor Frye pursues these purposes with wit and rigor and with the whole of literature as his familiar province.

Recently this tendency to explain themselves, always present among critics, has become the mainstream of the art itself, and though there are parallels enough—the eighteenth-century psychological critics come to mind—the concerns of a writer with the foundations of his subject seems curiously modern, and criticism of criticism has a contemporary ring to it. The reasons for that concern might be worth investigating, for it is fairly certain that they could provide a substantial clue to the nature of much significant contemporary thought. But lacking any such insight, we can only observe now that abstraction is, of course, a mighty source of power, and the movement from considering the “pragmatical pig of the impossible world” to a consideration of considering the pig seems to represent an advance in knowledge or at least a new vision of the subject.

At first reading, then, one is tempted to say that in his theory of criticism it is simply power for criticism that Professor Frye seeks, and that his *Anatomy of Criticism* is not really what its title suggests, a skeleton, but a matrix (his own definition of a distinct prose form—the anatomy—is not amiss here: “creative treatment of exhaustive erudition” [311]); in industrial terminology, Professor Frye has set up the capital molds or machine tools to produce the machines to produce the product, and one might reasonably expect soon to see—in fact, one is already seeing—parcels of practical criticism wrapped and labelled “The Archetypal School.” In the *Anatomy* one encounters many frightened statements of this sort: “If criticism could ever be conceived as a coherent and systematic study, the elementary principles of which could be explained to any intelligent nineteen-year-old, then, from the point of view of such a conception, no critic now knows the first thing about criticism” [14]. Well, perhaps. But does the substitution of system for experience really solve anything? And does Professor Frye want to replace with the standards of an intelligent nineteen-year-old the experience of Dryden, Johnson, and Arnold, to name only the most intelligible (though scarcely the most systematic) of our critics?

But while it is sometimes hard to see what else besides the package deal of practical criticism can be the end of scientific criticism, this is not at all fair to Professor Frye’s own humanism, to his brilliant theorizing, or to his valid claim that “theory of literature is as primary a humanistic and liberal pursuit as its practice” [20]. Criticism is, in fact, presented here as disinterested, an end in itself, its own justification; and Professor Frye’s analogies between criticism and mathematics or physics—though often puzzling—should merely remind us that while technology accumulates in the presence of science, technology is not science, and we ought not to confuse the scholar or critic with the man who would buy and sell his products by the square yard or in bulk lots.

It is Professor Frye’s “polemical introduction” to the four essays of his *Anatomy* which raises these questions of the end of criticism and which argues for the possibility of a science of criticism, a totally intelligible body of knowledge derived from literature by the intuitions and arts of induction or acquaintance. And it is here too that he takes a vigorous swipe at value judgments. A demonstrable value judgment, he tells us, is “the donkey’s carrot of literary criticism” [20]. . . . Throughout the four essays one is constantly being jolted into new awareness by Professor Frye’s individual, precise use of words and by the dazzling (I had almost said fearful) symmetry of his argument.

But in the midst of complexity two central themes run, like golden threads, brightly and clearly. Without radical distortion of his argument, we may state these as first, the centrality of the arts in civilization, and second, the conventionality or “formality” of art. Art is not only the central

human activity but, paradoxically, an imitation of itself. His claim for the central position of art is, Professor Frye, recognizes, traditional, and his defense of it is perhaps the most significant part of his work. . . .

In critical theory too little has been made of this paradoxical, central position. If art is displayed as existing between the poles of realism and convention (Theory of Modes), and if it derives its significance from its relation to its extremes (Theory of Symbols), it follows that its formal principles will be most apparent when it is least involved in experience, when it is explicitly conventional, mythical, abstract (Theory of Myths). Similarly, if poetry is simply an imitation of nature, then the individual poem is isolated. . . , for the poem is “unique, a *techné* or artifact, with its own peculiar structure of imagery, to be examined by itself without immediate reference to other things like it” [95]. But it is clear that poems may be imitations not only of nature but of other poems. Form, the organizing principle, is thus not only the distinguishing structure of a poem but its convention as well. . . .

In a period in which popular notions of criticism and literature are still based on a naive realism and in which there is, as a result, considerable resistance to the teaching of literature (or criticism) as a civilizing or liberal art, though there is a demand for it as an instrument or technique (teach my engineers to write), the *Anatomy of Criticism* is a work of utmost importance. A systematic account of the nature of art is not only a defense of criticism but a defense of art as well, because it is the sort of account which insists on the integrity of art and the only one which can speak for the dumb arts. If critics go on with their own business, suggests Professor Frye, the social and practical result of their labors will be the re forging of “the broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept” [354].

It is difficult to resist raising one last problem which the notion of convention in art suggests. If the formal principles of art are most clearly displayed in mythical literature, does it follow that they ought so to be displayed in all literature? Or that convention ought to be made explicit? This implies a value judgment which, if it is not made by Professor Frye himself, is found to emerge from the emphasis of his work: the clearer the archetype, the better the work. One can only answer by pointing out that there is a difference between criticism which is poetic and poetry which is versified critical theory. The sad ghost of Mark Akenside still beckons from the shadows.

Perhaps what is curious about the *Anatomy* is that one finds oneself blaming Professor Frye for implications which he skillfully denies or avoids: that criticism is technology, that all literature ought to be explicitly conventional, that criticism is not concerned with values. But this is only to say that here we have one of those seminal works which is bound to be of enormous influence; it cannot be ignored. One recognizes this as one recognizes in dreams those images which are the critical ones. They are oddly familiar and obviously they are of immense significance, though precisely what their significance is, one cannot always easily say. Reading the *Anatomy of Criticism* one is forcefully reminded of such dream images, like the one, for example, which opens Franz Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*: “It's a remarkable piece of apparatus,” said the officer to the explorer and surveyed the apparatus which was after all quite familiar to him.”

13. Vance, Thomas. “The Juggler.” *Nation* 188 (17 January 1959): 57–8.

This is a brilliant but bristling book, an important though thoroughly controversial attempt to establish order in a disorderly field. For a decade to come, scholars and critics will be borrowing, improving, and attacking Mr. Frye's ideas. The unprofessional reader, even the literate one, may at first be put off by a work which looks and is strenuous from beginning to end. But with a little persistence and good will, he too may find his way past the bristles to the points of brilliance. In the

process, he will meet an odd and arresting mixture of qualities in the author—qualities which have to be appreciated before the book can either be judged or enjoyed.

Mr. Frye has wit, style, audacity, immense learning, a gift for opening up new and unexpected perspectives in the study of literature. At the same time he is a formidable classifier and system-builder. When the fit is on him, he can pull categories out of his sleeve like a scholastic magician. This streak of exuberant pedantry can't be entirely separated from what is exciting and creative in his work. It relates him, curiously but refreshingly, to the great jugglers of literature—from Rabelais through Swift and Sterne to Joyce—whom he has clearly read with special relish. It relates him also, in a different but complementary way, to the great architects of intricate poetic universes: Dante, Spenser, Milton, the Blake of the Prophetic Works, the Yeats of *A Vision*. . . . A breath from the world of these grave and ironic masters blows through Mr. Frye's book, bringing with it something of their bent for mystification, of their disdain for the casual reader's comfort, and something, too, of their tonic vitality. In short, for all his talk about making criticism a science or a "systematic structure of knowledge," Mr. Frye's work has in it a touch of the mythopoeic boldness which excites him in his favorite authors. Accordingly, some of his more elaborate flights are to be taken with a sprinkling of salt; then his work will show its true savor.

It would be hopeless to attempt a brief summary of Mr. Frye's dazzlingly counterpointed classifications. Let us simplify and go to the heart of his critical thought. His first and radical assumption is that literature is a universe—not a "piled aggregate of 'works'" [17], but a single world, infinitely various yet self-contained and marked by an intelligible order. Here he sets himself against the whole movement of modern scholarship and criticism toward the specialized and the fragmented. Most scholars are imprisoned in their cubicles; most contemporary critics are caught in the provincialism of the "ironic mode," as Mr. Frye calls the dominant tendency of high literary culture in the twentieth century. He himself is an expert performer in the ironic mode. He knows all about Freudian complexes and Jungian archetypes, about existentialist absurdity and semantic ambiguity. He has fully mastered the methods of the New Critics, and can outdo most of them in tracing the modulations of a sonnet by Wyatt or in explicating an episode from *Ulysses*. But his originality lies in his largeness of perspective. While he experiences the irony-centered writing of our time from within, he also perceives it from without, as one aspect of an infinitely wider world of literature.

Mr. Frye clearly owes a great deal to Eliot's notion, which he echoes with approval, that the literature of Europe from Homer has had a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. But he goes beyond Eliot. He sees Eliot's "order" as the universal structure of literature, in which every single work participates. That structure is mythic at the center, though it may show any degree of realism on the surface. The principle of metaphoric identification, absolute in myth, is attenuated or rationalized in more realistic modes; but its influence is still central and vital. "In myth," Mr. Frye writes, "we see the structural principles of literature isolated; in realism we see the *same* structural principles (not similar ones) fitting into a context of plausibility" [136]. That may seem to slight realism, and perhaps Mr. Frye does favor the poets. Yet he shows himself a true admirer of Fielding, Tolstoy, Proust. He is merely attempting to see their creations as participants in the world's body of literature.

In this simplified account I have left out Mr. Frye's treatment of rhythm, his supersubtle but provocative theory of genres, his brilliant insight—suggested by Aristotle's categories but going far beyond them—into the shifting relation between plot and theme or thought in various literary forms. I have left out his labyrinths of schematic detail, for he himself, in his more self-critical moments, acknowledges them to be expendable. But perhaps I have said enough to suggest that his book has a value that outweighs its extravagances. Perhaps his view of a world of myth at the heart of literature is itself a myth. If so, it is a myth that is very much worth exploring, even in its more

tedious-looking ramifications. For Mr. Frye's subtlety can be deceptive. When he seems to be splitting hairs, he is sometimes actually splitting atoms, and releasing a new measure of imaginative energy.

14. Whalley, George. "Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*." *Tamarack Review* 8 (Summer 1958): 92–8, 100–1.

Anatomy may be defined as a dissection carried out to determine the structure of an organized body. This book is a dissection of literature in an attempt to give "a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism" [3]. The primary aim, Professor Frye tells us, is to give his reasons for believing in such a synoptic view; the secondary aim to provide a "tentative version" of such a view to convince readers that "a view . . . is attainable" [3]. And the whole group of suggestions is intended to be of practical use to critics and students of literature. . . .

In this book there is continuous evidence of sustained and original thinking, fine perception, and controlled insight. Examples and illustrations are drawn from an impressive array of reading. The sections on comedy and on prose fiction are particularly interesting; there are eloquent symptoms of a Rabelaisian delight in Rabelais; there is a memorable passage on the qualities of good swearing. Throughout there are many correct, incisive, and striking judgments and observations upon literature in general and upon particular works of literature; and nothing in this review should distract a reader from recognizing and savoring these. The manner of writing is taut, unelaborate, beautifully controlled, almost truculent in its accomplishment. The argument is enlivened by epigrams sometimes shockingly apposite, sometimes provocatively contentious. But not all of the witty and epigrammatic matter is of this sort. At times—sometimes at crucial points—the argument is conducted rhetorically through speed and virtuosity, turning upon the adroit lectern quip and upon the verbal paradoxes that "split half-truths in order to sharpen their cutting edges" [18]. Occasional gestures of rejection and distaste indicate a less than ideal catholicity of sympathy. None of these idiosyncrasies would be particularly troublesome if they did not contribute to a complex uneasiness difficult to trace to its source: a sustained posture of unhesitating authority, a persistent tone of irony, the use of a subtle rhetoric, a habit of clearing the ground by the use of invective.

The aim of this compilation of essays, Frye tells us, is not to attack methods of criticism but to attack the barriers between the methods. This sounds like a purpose public and useful enough. But he also says that "a book of this kind can only be offered to a reader who has enough sympathy with its aims to overlook . . . whatever strikes him as inadequate or simply wrong" [29]. And this makes the book not public and oracular but hermetic—a document perhaps for the instruction of initiates. Yet the book has in fact been made public; its intriguing complexities and commanding tone of authority can be expected to secure for it wide circulation. And if the present state of criticism is correctly described by Frye as "a mystery-religion without a gospel" [14]—whatever that means—this volume might easily become regarded as the gospel long awaited. This metaphor of religion is used advisedly: because the book strongly implies a tendency to find in literature a substitute for religion, and in criticism a substitute for literature. The more I try to locate and examine my doubts about this book, the more they prove to be not disagreements about matters in method in the conceptual field but centrifugal issues pointing first to the premises, and then beyond these to the reasons for choosing those particular premises. But that leads the inquiry in a direction critically irrelevant and socially impertinent.

As a work of criticism this book will be stimulating for its clear-cut if not always impeccable views on a wide range of writing, and from the illumination that will come from any attempt to classify any single work according to Frye's complex *schemata* (once one has got round to mastering

them). When one looks at the *Anatomy* as an essay in poetics one feels less confident. For one discovers that the view of language as autonomous, self-shaping, impervious to all external influences is more closely related than one would have expected to the desire to establish criticism as a science free of value judgments.

Language in itself does not mean, but persons can. Language records a person's attempt to say what he means and what he "sees." This is the case whether the poet is speaking deliberately out of a prepared program or almost automatically out of dream or trance. The alternative to Frye's view that "Poetry can only be made out of other poems" [97] is not to collapse into some crude form of the "Intentional Fallacy." As long as the literal meaning of a poem is the total meaning, there is no reason for excluding the poet's meaning: it at least is actual and irreducible, even if only to be discerned in the poem itself. A complete self-contained verbal universe would be a complete hollow universe incapable of the transvaluative function Frye ascribes to it. Criticism can become "an ethical instrument" only by forcing us *out* of the verbal universe into action and "life and reality." But of this process and of this possibility and need the *Anatomy* gives no account.

Altogether Frye seems to want to destroy all relation between literature and experience, at least in the "highest" forms of literature. His use of the term *mimesis* is interesting in this respect. On the one hand, he expands the term "symbol," "literature," and "dream" to a point of omnivalence which makes discrimination difficult. On the other hand, he restricts the terms "experience" and "intention" to a narrowness that with justice can scarcely be ascribed to any intelligent critic or philosopher. Yet the term *mimesis* remains conveniently vague, is omitted from the glossary, and is normally used to imply something like the common-sense notion of "imitation"—plausible or descriptive similarity, point-for-point resemblance. It is, however, legitimate to consider that Aristotle does not so limit his term; that he uses the word *mimesis* to indicate the varying but indefinable connection between literature and experience. But such a view of *mimesis* would break the self-sufficiency of Frye's verbal universe. This might be dismissed as a matter of interpretative opinion if we did not notice that the appeal to science serves a similar deflective function by outlawing the value judgments that would infringe upon the verbal universe. This book does not impress one with the scientific possibilities of criticism. To take one point only: the analogies drawn from the Ptolemaic astronomy, from Spengler and Frazer are all analogies outmoded in their own disciplines. This might not matter if the Great Wheel diagram in the third essay did not behave the way scientific analogies do when they need to be replaced, exhibiting features of excessive complication, assymetry, and rigidity.

In the Introduction Frye says that criticism could be a social science. If it were, value judgment would have to be taken into account as a datum in any observed phenomenon; and Frye wants to banish value judgments from criticism. Yet the *Anatomy* is an intricate web of value judgments—not because Frye is a bad scientist, but because he is engaged in critical activity. Without value judgment there can be no sense of fact in criticism, no sense of relevance; and I have always supposed that one of the main educational virtues of criticism was in the refinement of value judgments. Without a sense of value, particularly in the field of archetype and myth, the critic is in precisely the position Frye assigns to the sociologist working on literary material: "Horatio Alger and the writer of the Elsie books may well be more important than Hawthorne or Melville, and a single issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* worth all Henry James" [19].

The *Anatomy* is not using scientific method: it is using "science" as a suggestive analogy. This would account for the peculiar definition of a poem as "a hypothetical verbal structure" [245]—which suggests that the relation between a poem and "experience" is the same as (or analogous to?) the relation between a tentative scientific assumption and natural phenomena. But in the Conclusion Frye finds a more promising parallel for criticism in mathematics—which is some indication of the degree of abstraction he is looking for. Here an ominous note is sounded:

“Mathematics relates itself directly to the common field of experience . . . not to avoid it but with the ultimate design of swallowing it” [352]. Is it the aim of art to “swallow” life, of criticism to “swallow” art? The word is not defined: but it sounds voracious.

A final point. Frye is content to see myth as a “structural principle of literary form.” Recurrence is one thing; organization is another. A pattern cannot organize. And it is precisely the lack of any adequate organizing energy in this scheme that makes it in the end unacceptable as a synoptic view of the field. The psychological determinism of desire and repugnance fails to give an adequate account of anagogic myth as we encounter it in literature. Myth without belief is simply either a pattern of narrative or an arrangement of symbols neutral in value. Poetic belief—a strong sense of the power and manifold meaning of a myth—is “belief for the moment,” a genuine belief very different from hypothetical acceptance “for the sake of [poetic] argument.” Compare Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode* with Yeats’s *Leda and the Swan*. Belief is the energetic principle of myth, and it imprints itself indelibly upon whatever form it may assume. For an artist to repeat the pattern without belief will neither energize the pattern nor restore belief, much as one could wish otherwise. But Frye does not discuss this element of belief in myth.

The view of myth I am advancing is one aspect of a view of knowledge and of truth. Truth and knowledge, in any extralogical field, is not comprised of portable “things known” or “things known as true.” Knowledge in such a sphere is inseparable from the mode of apprehension which is also a function of the reason for wanting to know. In Frye’s static and abstract morphology the only energetic principle is the dialectic of desire and repugnance. Outside the closed system of desire and repugnance, I am sure, vision operates as an overarching principle, redeeming both life and art from determinism and mere humanity. I cannot define vision, nor can I say precisely what is “seen” in vision. Nevertheless, my own experience of literature persuades me that there is vision beyond desire. Desire can easily be mistaken for vision, as the stylite mystics well knew; and vision can be repugnant. The artist’s vision, disclosed to the reader, focused perhaps by the critic’s insight, can make art a civilizing force. But there are many chances of a break in continuity in that process; and to call literature a “technique of civilization” is either to overlook that fact or to fall back on one of the most popular emotive terms of our time.

I feel personal regret at not finding this book, in its speculative and synoptic aspects, satisfactory. So much of it is brilliant, memorable, stimulating; the writing is superb and there is much excellent criticism. Yet so much of it is perverse, ingenious, desolate; at crucial points gaining rhetorical speed and assuming a sharp edge to seek safety in irony, as though desire were in perpetual conflict with vision.

Other Reviews

- Adams, Hazard. “Criticism: Whence and Whither?” *American Scholar* 28 (Spring 1959): 232, 238.
- Altarocca, Claudio. “Anatomia della critica.” *Il Resto del Carlino* (2 July 1969). Review of the Italian translation.
- Amoruso, Vito. “Una analisi dei generi letterari.” *Paese Sera* (11 July 1969). Review of the Italian translation.
- Angyalosi, Gergely. “Egy tudós vágyálmai.” *Élet és Irodalom* 4, no. 15 (16 April 1999). Review of Hungarian translation.
- Anonymous. *Südwestfunk* [Baden Baden], 2 September 1965. Review of the German translation.
- _____. *Minnesota Review* (Fall 1994): 131.
- _____. *Welt der Bücher* [Freiburg] 6 (1966).
- _____. *Globe & Mail* (14 April 2001): D16.
- _____. *Dalhousie Review* 74 (Spring 1994): 65. Review of the German translation.

- _____. *Times Literary Supplement* (19 October 1990): 1137.
- B., O. *National-Zeitung* [Basel] 519 (9 November 1964). Review of the German translation.
- Baum, Paull F. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 57 (Winter 1958): 140–1.
- Beaujean, Marion. *Bücherei and Bildung* [Reutlingen] 1966). Review of the German translation.
- B[eebe], M[aurice]. *Modern Fiction Studies* 3 (Winter 1957–8): 366.
- Burke, Fidelian. *Literature East & West* 5 (Summer 1958): 13–14.
- Busch, Günther. “Anatomie der Literaturkritik.” *Neues Forum* 14 (February 1967): 186–7. Review of the German translation.
- Carrier, Giles. “La critique est-elle une science?” *Études Françaises* [Montreal] 6 (May 1970): 221–6. Review of the French translation.
- Celati, Gianni. “Anatomie e sistematiche letterarie.” *Libri Nuovi*, August 1969, 5. Review of the Italian translation.
- Clapp, Edwin R. *Western Humanities Review* 13 (Winter 1959): 109–12.
- Demetz, Peter. “Heilsam durch milde Gifte: Zu Northrop Fryes Kritischer Poetik.” *Die Zeit*, 18 September 1964, 7.
- Douglas, Wallace. *College English* 19 (March 1958): 279–80.
- Forst, Graham. “Humanism Betrayed.” *Canadian Literature* 178 (Autumn 2003): 129–30. Review of 2000 impression with foreword by Harold Bloom.
- Friedman, Melvin J. *Books Abroad* 32 (Autumn 1958): 451–2.
- Frise, Dr. “Kulturelles Wort.” Broadcast on Hessischer Rundfunk [Frankfurt] on 10 February 1965. 7-p. typescript.
- Grenzmann, Wilhelm. “Der Zustand der Literaturkritik.” *Echo der Zeit* [Recklinghausen] 18 April 1969. Review of the German translation.
- Gorlier, Claudio. “I formalisti.” *Corriere della Serra* (10 August 1969). Review of the Italian translation.
- Hallie, Philip. “The Master Builder.” *Partisan Review* 31 (Fall 1964): 650–1.
- Hamilton, P.W. *English Journal* 72, no. 2 (1983): 91–92.
- Herman-Sekulić, Maja. “Jedno dugo iščekivanje.” *Kultura* [Belgrade] 45-6 (1979): 271–4. Review of the Serbo-Croatian translation.
- Hochmuth, Marie. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 43 (October 1957): 312–14 [313].
- Isoya, Takashi. *Nihon dokusho shimbun* [*The Japan Review of Books*], 28 July 1980. Review of the Japanese translation. In Japanese.
- Karita, Motoshi. *Eibungaku kenkyu* [*Studies in English Literature*] 35, no. 1i (1958): 121–5. Review of the English edition. In Japanese.
- Kattan, Naïm. “Enfin en français, ‘L’Anatomie de la critique.’” *Le Devoir*, 21 March 1970, 16. Review of the French translation.
- Kawasaki, Toshihiko. *Eigo seinen* [*The Rising Generation*] 126 (December 1980): 35. Review of the Japanese translation. In Japanese.
- Kochan, Detlef C. *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Germanisten-Verbandes* 4 (December 1965). Review of the German translation.
- Konrad, Gustav. *Welt und Wort* [Munich] 5 (1965). Review of the German translation.
- Kumar, Anita S. *Osmania Journal of English Studies* 3 (1963): 83–5.
- K., P. *Slovenske Diradlo* 2 (1968). Review of the German translation. In Czechoslovakian.
- Laszlo, Barlay. *Helikon* [Budapest] 4 (1966). Review of the German translation. In Romanian.
- Marin, Antonio Gomez. “Northrop Frye: ‘Anatomia de la Critica.’” *Triunfo* 32 (3 December 1977): 56. Review of the Spanish translation.
- Mercier, Vivian. “A Synoptic View of Criticism.” *Commonweal* 66 (20 September 1957): 618–9.

- Muntean, George. *Revista de istorie si teorie literară* 22, no. 3 (1973): 484–6. Review of the Romanian translation.
- Niedermayer, F. “Gericht über die Richter: Klassiker und Theoretiker der literarischen Kritik.” *Deutsche Tagespost* [Würzburg] 11–12 February 1966. Review of the German translation.
- Pintarić, Jadranka. “Autonoman jezik književnosti.” *Vjesnik* 17 siječnja (2001): 1. Review of the Serbo-Croatian translation.
- Praz, Mario. “Humor nero e grigiorosa.” *Il Tempo* (10 December 1972). Review of the 2nd ed. of the Italian translation.
- Pritchard, J.P. “Critical Art Is Analyzed.” *Oklahoman*, 22 September 1957.
- Raditsa, Leo F. “Anatomy of Criticism.” *The Griffin* 6 (August 1957): 18–23.
- Reilly, John J. <http://pages.prodigy.net/aesir/aoc.htm>. Review of the 1990 reprint.
- Rigoni, Andrea. “Anatomia della critica letteraria.” *L’Osservatore Romano* (16 May 1970). Review of the Italian translation.
- _____. “Morte o vita del romanzo.” *L’Osservatore Romano* (10 June 1971). Review of the Italian translation.
- Sackton, Alexander. *Criticism* 1 (Winter 1959): 72–5.
- Saltini, Vittorio. “La critica vista al microscopio.” *L’Espresso* (25 January 1970). Review of the Italian translation.
- Šebek, Josef. “Fryeův dialog s literaturou. Vyšel dlouho očekávaný překlad knihy Northropa Fryea *Anatomie kritiky*.” *Lidové noviny* 17, no. 113 (2004): 14. Review of the Czech translation.
- Shimada, Taro. *The Yomiuri*, 28 July 1980, Book Review section. Review of the Japanese translation. In Japanese.
- St, G. *Schlesiviger Nachrichten*, 6 March 1965. Review of the German translation.
- Stobie, Margaret. “Mr. Fry[e] Stands Well Back.” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 July 1958, 43.
- Sutton, Walter. *Symposium* 12 (Spring–Fall 1958): 211–15.
- Takahashi, Yasunari. “Towards a Regeneration of Criticism.” *Hon to hihyo* [*The Editors’ Monthly*] 71 (September 1980); 12–18. Review of the Japanese translation. In Japanese.
- Takamatsu, Yuichi. *Asabi Journal* 21 (8 August 1980): 65–6. Review of the Japanese translation. In Japanese.
- Takayanagi, Shunichi. *Sophia* 7 (1958): 97–101. Rpt. in Takayanagi’s *Seishinshi no naka no Eibungaku* [*English Literature in the Context of Intellectual History*] (Tokyo: Nansosha 1977), 170–4. In Japanese.
- Unami, Akira. *Tosho shimbun* [*The Book Weekly*], 30 August 1980. Review of the Japanese translation. In Japanese.
- Vance, Thomas. “The Juggler.” *Nation* 188 (17 January 1959): 57–8.
- Vladanović, Matko. “Northrop Frye: Anatomija kritike.” *StudentNet +5* (20 January 2007). <http://www.studentnet.hr/knjige/show/2104/>. Review of the Croatian translation.
- Wutz, H. *Stimmen der Zeit* [Munich] 4 (1966). Review of the German translation.