

ARTICLES

THE FIRST MAJOR THEORETICIAN? NORTHROP FRYE AND LITERARY THEORY

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- 82 In his book *The Twentieth Century Humanists: From Spitzer to Frye*, William Calin declares that Northrop Frye was “arguably the last great humanist critic and the first major theoretician” (118). Critics today can and likely will rebel against this claim; some might note, for instance, that surely Plato or Aristotle could also be recognized as the first major theoreticians (at least in the West). In this paper, I am concerned with the latter part of his claim; specifically, Frye and the history of literary theory. Frye’s role and reputation are, of course, hotly contested and debated among supporters of Frye and his adversaries. It must be admitted from the outset that Frye has fallen out of favour in the academy, at least in literary studies. While Calin lauds Frye, it is equally important to remember that Terry Eagleton (in)famously quipped, “Who now reads Frye?” (in Denham, “Pity” 17). Likewise, in their introduction to a special volume of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* in honour of the Frye Centenary, Germaine Warkentin and Linda Hutcheon soberly write, “[s]ince his death in 1991, Frye’s ideas have continued to be vigorously promoted and as vigorously scorned” (5). In many ways, there is a kind of paradox at play. Frye’s ideas are still frequently taught in university courses; after all, the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* still includes Frye’s theories on genre and archetype. And yet, Frygian scholars continue to “vigorously promote,” and I might add, “protect,” Northrop Frye. At this moment in literary history it behooves us to review the work of Northrop Frye, especially since we now have the complete *Collected Works of Northrop Frye* that expands thirty volumes and bridges the divide between the published author and the private theoretician and critic, as well as a couple of apocryphal volumes: *Northrop Frye’s Uncollected Prose*, recently published by University of Toronto Press, and *Northrop Frye: Selected Letters*, published by McFarlane Press, both of which were edited by Robert D. Denham.

Robert D. Denham, a preeminent Frye scholar, has provided numerous cogent defences of Frye's work. In 2007, for instance, Denham writes, "[t]here are plenty of reasons for celebrating the jubilee year, among them the facts that *Anatomy of Criticism* has been continuously in print for more than fifty years and has sold 150,000 copies" ("Pity" 17). The same, of course, cannot be said of all of Frye's work. But Denham further notes, "between 1964 and 2003 saw another 192 doctoral dissertations devoted in whole or part to Frye, 'in part' meaning 'Frye' is indexed as a subject in *Dissertation Abstracts International*" ("Pity" 23), and moreover, "[i]n 2003, Frye was indexed as a subject of fourteen doctoral dissertations, the highest number for any year" ("Pity" 23). But Denham is not alone. Ian Slone declares, "Northrop Frye is the most complete United Church of Canada theologian that the church has yet produced" (107). Likewise, Thomas Willard devotes an article to "the genius of Northrop Frye," in which he ultimately concludes, "I think we can safely say that he had genius" (46), which would run counter to Harold Bloom's claim that "Frye's criticism will survive because it is serious, spiritual, and comprehensive, but not because it is systematic or a manifestation of genius" (xi). In his article "The Social Vision of Frye's Criticism: The Scandal of Undiscriminating Catholicity," Jonathan Arac begins, "*Anatomy of Criticism* is the greatest work of positive literary criticism yet produced in English, but its standing has continuously been haunted by unease over Frye's refusing to grant value-judgments any place within criticism" (163), a point that Harold Bloom has seen (and continues to see) as his chief—and lasting—difference with his precursor, Northrop Frye.¹ What is clear is that Frye's place in literary history is one that seems to be, at least at first glance, quite secure, even if debated. These critical voices are, after all, just a selection of possible choices, all of which aim to show how strong, good, or important a critic Northrop Frye was and continues to be; however, very little is said about the content or the argument of his work in these value judgments. Frye must first be lauded and praised before one can begin to work with Frygian thought.

Before moving ahead to the argument of this article, however, it does seem necessary to outline the importance of Frye's own work. Frye wrote more than thirty books of literary criticism and hundreds of articles. Frye's first book, a significant piece of literary criticism, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), remains a defining study of William Blake, and helped to elevate Blake's own status in literary history from a minor poet to a major poetic and visionary voice. One of Frye's achievements in his study of Blake was that he somehow managed to write as though he were Blake, a fact noted in many reviews. Indeed, even Marshall McLuhan, with whom Frye had a "gingerly relationship" (Warkentin, in Frye 21.xxxi), writes that Frye managed "to speak of current issues as we might suppose Blake would have spoken" (in *CW* 14.xliv).² In *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye devoted himself to Blake, in an attempt to understand fully Blake's poetic work. For Frye, "the interpretation of Blake is only the beginning of a complete revolution in one's reading of all poetry" (14.18), and, in many regards, this idea lends itself to Frye's second and arguably most

important work.

Anatomy of Criticism (1957) took to heart Blake's oft-cited quotation, "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's," and Frye certainly created a system of literature that was schematic, structural, archetypal, and ultimately encompassing (at least for those who promote Frygian criticism). In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye advances his theory of centrifugal and centripetal movements in the study of literature, as well as a theory of archetypes, genres, modes, and history. His theory of literature, in his mind at least, could be applied to much of Western literature. Likewise, Harold Bloom certainly agreed; he wrote that Frye was "the foremost living student of Western Literature" (Salusinszky 58, in Denham, "Pity" 21). In an article in honour of the Frye Centenary that appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, Bruce Meyer writes:

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What was missing from Frye's criticism throughout his career, and what may be the source of the dismissiveness his name engenders today, was an awareness of works beyond the central English canon. He did not foresee how multiculturalism, post-colonialism, feminism, or even queer theory would change the way we read literature, and his perception of the mythic structures and archetypes inherent in the Western tradition gave little scope to the broad and almost universal mythos that would express itself in the form of aboriginal literature.

Frye, however, argued—at least in his public writings—that "the centre of the literary universe is whatever poem we happen to be reading. One step further, and the poem appears as a microcosm of all literature, an individual manifestation of the total order of words" (22.112). All poems are thus, necessarily, connected, related, and we can, as scholars, trace an archetype's history throughout the totality of literature. In the particular, we can find the universal, as Frye elaborated in the opening chapter of *Fearful Symmetry*. Blake provided the particular example that allowed for the universalizing project of *Anatomy of Criticism*.

Briefly, I do want to speak here to the "private writings" of Northrop Frye. It does seem worthwhile to begin now to consider the private writings made public by the editors of the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye* since now "Frye scholars have access to all of his writing," which includes "thousands of pages of notebooks, diaries, and letters" (Graham 3). The private writings amass some "46 percent of the total (close to five million words)" in the *Collected Works* (Denham, *Northrop Frye and Others* 5). For Robert D. Denham, "it seems likely that as this material comes to be assimilated by those interested in Frye's achievement, new dimensions of his thought will be revealed" (*Northrop Frye and Others* 5). Indeed, Denham goes on to argue that "the degree to which recent scholarship on Frye has taken advantage of the expanded Frye canon has so far not been very encouraging" (*Northrop Frye and Others* 5). Certainly, this would seem to be the case, but there are, I think, methodological challenges in addressing these private writings, especially since, as Denham himself admits, the writings were "not intended for publication" (*Northrop Frye and Others* 5). Nonetheless, these writings have been made public and Denham is right that they

undoubtedly will add new dimensions to our understanding of Frye, his ideas, and his work.

Following *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye published prolifically on a variety of themes and concerns, but in many ways, each book was an extension of *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye spent many years responding to critiques of his argument against value judgements, which divided and continues to divide many critics of Frye. The governing concern for Frye, however, as Jean O’Grady notes, was simply that “no critical work can be based on value-judgments. If you say Shakespeare is the greatest writer who ever lived, for instance, this judgment is neither a help nor a hindrance to your analysis of the plays, and adds no new knowledge” (229). Indeed, Frye argued, “a selective approach to tradition [...] invariably has some ultra-critical joker concealed in it” (22.24). The trouble with value judgements is that they cannot advance knowledge or criticism of a given work, and yet, as we shall see, Frye was not above value judgements.

In his 1963 lectures, *The Educated Imagination*, which were originally broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Frye began by asking what surely seems like a simple question: “[w]hat good is the study of literature?” (21.347). The question is one that might—indeed *should*—be asked of any scholar of literature. The question of value is implicit, but the greater concern is the social function of literature. In 1971, he continued his study of the value of literature in *The Critical Path*, a lengthy essay that returns to old questions. Frye writes, “criticism will always have two aspects, one toward the structure of literature and one turned toward the other cultural phenomena that form the social environment of the literature. Together, they balance each other: when one is worked on to the exclusion of the other, the critical perspective goes out of focus” (27.15). One might suggest that in *The Critical Path*, Frye is now aware of his role in the development of literary theory, and cautiously reminding his readers that the reader must pay attention to both the text and its context.

In 1976, Frye published *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, which returned him to the study of genre. Frye remains, to this day, an essential theorist of genre. Fredric Jameson, for example, admits in *Archaeologies of the Future*, “[a]ny reflection on genre today owes a debt—sometimes an unwilling one—to Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*” (257 n.3). Jameson, of course, made significant use of Frye’s work in his own magisterial *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (which is based, at least in part, on a series of lectures that Jameson gave as the first Northrop Frye Visiting Professor of Literary Theory at the University of Toronto). *The Secular Scripture* focussed specifically on the structure of romance, and has been of significant use to scholars of romance in its most ample definition: from science fiction to the popular romance novel.

Finally, Frye concludes his career with a return to the study of symbols and what might be called a desire to find “a kind of grammar of symbolism” (20.5). Throughout his famous “Bible Books”: *Creation and Recreation* (1980), *The Great Code: Being a Study of the Bible and Literature* (1981), *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of*

the Bible and Literature (1990), and the posthumously published *The Double Vision* (1991), Frye is seeking and searching this grammar. At the close of his life, Frye was returning to old themes. At the time of his death, for instance, he was beginning a study of utopia. In this brief overview, I have worked to show how Frye's work, though very diverse, was consistent and each book seems to be connected to the previous and reaches towards the next.³

Turning (or returning) to Frye today, one is confronted by the systematic and seemingly apolitical nature of Frygian criticism. For some, such as Joseph Adamson, this quality is what makes Frye's work the "single most important contribution to the history of thought: his highly sophisticated and complex defence of literary and artistic culture, his insistence on the priority of a fully developed imaginative response to literary works and on the central role of the verbal imagination in human culture in general" (73). Admirable as this might be, it is a contribution that is complicated and difficult. Frye's theories, at least in this light, are theories that are not committed to an ideology per se. Frye argued against literary criticism that had "to be 'based on' something else, carried around in some kind of religious or Marxist or Freudian wheelchair" (27.312), and undoubtedly the same could be said of more recent theoretical interventions.

Frye's politics, however, are confusing. His apologists often argue that "Frye's politics are beyond 'Left' and 'Right'" (Graham 6); however, his critics are seemingly able to locate his politics, and often quite quickly. During the 1960s, as we have recently learned, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had aligned Frye with the left. During this period, the RCMP spied on Frye because he was perceived to be a communist sympathizer. On campus, however,

there was a very disturbing attack against Frye from the zany and violent Maoists, the Canadian Student Movement, which operated out of multiple fronts. [...] In January 1969, one of Frye's graduate students, Frank Carner, picked up a copy on campus of an anonymously and odiously written pamphlet, *Objective Idealism is Fascism: A Denunciation of Northrop Frye's "Literary Criticism"* published "under the direction" of a newly created "Necessity for Change Institute of Ideological Studies." (Ayre 325)

The pamphlet's stated goal was "to mobilize revolutionary intellectuals against [Frye]" (Ayre 325). The pamphlet was later credited to Pauline Kogan, who, in the words of William Calin, "denounces Frye for an alleged idealistic philosophy and clerical obscurantism that make him a spokesman for the decadent bourgeoisie" (136). Clearly, Frye's politics were of some confusion, and for many, this is precisely what makes Frye endearing, and for others, a reason for scorn.

As Adamson has noted, Frye was interested in the autonomy of literature. Frye thus creates a system that seemingly disengages with the political and ideological concerns of his age in favour of a politics of literary autonomy, which also, somehow, stands in opposition to "our critical approaches to literature [that] are driven [...] by ideological and political beliefs and agenda. From deconstruction through New Historicism, to cultural and race and gender studies" (Adamson 73). Frye's "single

most important contribution,” as Adamson has described it, clearly finds itself situated outside and against the rise of literary theory. When Frye is positioned in this fashion, he seemingly stands alongside Harold Bloom and against “the School of Resentment,” which Bloom has defined as consisting of “Feminists, Afrocentrists, Marxists, Foucault-inspired New Historicists, Deconstructionists” (*The Western Canon* 20).

Adamson’s perspective is one that may well resonate with those who are more interested in the “literary” side of “literary criticism.” Jean O’Grady, on the other hand, offers another reading of Frye’s relation to the “criticism” part of “literary criticism,”

The inclusiveness of the *Anatomy [of Criticism]*, its openness to works of popular literature or of dubious morality, should surely endear Frye to the various postmodernist, feminist, or post-colonial critics who complain of the formation of “canon” with its concomitant marginalization. Frye’s aim in *Anatomy* was not to rank works according to their perceived value—as had been done, for instance, by Leavis in *The Great Tradition*—but rather to study the articulation of the literary universe and the relations between literary works of all types. (227)

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O’Grady’s perspective would seem to resonate with Frygian criticism. Indeed, it was Frye who noted, in *The Critical Path*, the importance of context and text. Likewise, Frye’s methodology should, in theory, be open to those texts that are seemingly omitted from the “canon” (a term Frye seems uncomfortable with). The difference between O’Grady’s perspective and Adamson’s is about the practical value of criticism.

What, then, we might ask, is the goal of criticism? For what purpose does the critic study literature? Germaine Warkentin and Linda Hutcheon have spoken of Frye’s “own literary openness” (13), and it is in this regard that one can begin to see how Frye contributed to literary criticism in a fashion that recognizes the possibility of “ideological” interventions. Linda Hutcheon has also written anecdotally about her relation to Frye:

Like many Canadians educated at the University of Toronto, I was once Frye’s student, though I never knew him outside the classroom, then or later. My personal debt to him comes not only from what he taught me directly in his lectures and in his writing, but also from what he did to make English departments ‘safe’ (if not always hospitable) for a later generation of literary theorists who were also interested in Canadian literature and culture. (233-34)

I agree with Hutcheon, especially as a student who has benefited from those same classrooms at the University of Toronto where Frye’s influence is still felt. Literary theory, whatever Frye may have thought of it, became ‘safe’ because Frye was above all a literary theorist, who pushed for new directions in literary studies.

However, as we have already seen, Frye’s relation to literary theory, particularly what might be called “high theory,” is a complicated and vexed one, and one worthy of further consideration. For the remainder of this article, I will address Frye’s anxieties about the rise of literary theory, and, more particularly, his role in its rise. The question of literary theory today is one that is central to the promotion and denounce-

ment of Frygian criticism, as we have seen contrasted in the opinions of Adamson, O'Grady, and Hutcheon. This complication is all the more evident when one begins to read Northrop Frye's diaries and notebooks, which have only recently been published thanks to the efforts of many devoted Frygians, who have now published the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*.⁴ The private writings, for instance, as Robert D. Denham has informed, "hav[e] brought to light some ten thousand pages of previously unpublished writing, constituting now some 58% of the total Frye canon" ("Review").⁵

Northrop Frye's relation to literary theory is a complicated one, and one that needs to be carefully considered, especially in light of the observations by Adamson and O'Grady. Frye himself was keenly aware of literary theory and its development, and undoubtedly was aware of the role he played in literary theory. During the period of what Denham has called "the Late Notebooks," Frye began to detail privately his concerns about the rise of literary theory. Frye was mostly a generous and charitable critic and did not engage in "turf wars," at least not publicly. In private, however, a very different vision of Northrop Frye emerges, one who is anxious about literary theory. Towards the end of his life, he ungraciously wrote:

STATEMENT FOR THE DAY OF MY DEATH: The twentieth century saw an amazing development of scholarship and criticism in the humanities, carried out by people who were more intelligent, better trained, had more languages, had a better sense of proportion, and were infinitely more accurate scholars and competent professional men than I. I had genius. No one else in the field known to me had quite that. (6.725)

Denham has suggested that "Frye wrote very little without the double vision in mind, and one can sense in the coda both the impishness of the Socratic ironist, jolting us with the unexpected, and the truth contained in the literal meaning of the word 'genius,' reminding us of what finally motivated this architect of the spiritual world" (in Frye 6.725). I am not certain that one can explain away this strange moment in the history of Frygian thought; while it may very well be an ironic moment, it is also a discomfiting moment for many of his admirers. Harold Bloom, for instance, laments in the Foreword to the Princeton edition of *Anatomy of Criticism*:

The publication of Northrop Frye's Notebooks troubled some of his old admirers, myself included. One unfortunate passage gave us Frye's affirmation that he alone, of all modern critics, possessed genius. I think of Kenneth Burke and of William Empson; were they less gifted than Frye? Or were George Wilson Knight or Ernst Robert Curtius less original and creative than the Canadian master? (vii)

I admit that I am more inclined to Bloom's perspective on this "unfortunate passage" than I am to Denham's explanation. It is difficult to accept that Frye wrote an "ironic" statement for the day of his death, especially when one reads the notebooks. Frye writes, "[i]t doesn't matter how often I'm mentioned by other critics: I form part of the subtext of every critic worth reading" (5.205). If, indeed, Frye alone had genius, who then is "worth reading"? Frye was certainly proud of his accomplishments, but there

is a discord here. In question are Frye's genius and the realization that Frye forms the "subtext of any critic worth reading."

If we accept Calin's claim that Frye was "the first major theoretician" (118), we can safely assume that Frye does indeed form the "subtext of any critic worth reading" (Frye 5.205); after all, all critics would thus be writing in his shadow. What, however, can be said of how Frye read these critics? Frye was keenly aware, especially in the latter part of his life, of developments in literary theory; however, this was not always the case. In his 1949 diary, he seems surprised to learn of New Criticism: "Woodhouse has been asked to do a Milton paper at M.L.A. & his opposite is Cleanth Brooks, who apparently belongs to a group called 'New Critics' who are supposed to ignore historical criticism & concentrate on texture, whatever texture is" (8.288). In his 1950 diary, he seems to be disappointed to learn that he is now considered a New Critic: "[e]vidently I'm now classed as a 'new critic' across the line, so some old goat who thinks all new critics are psychopaths is letting off a blast at English Institute Essays of 1948" (8.392). Whether or not Frye was a new critic is not necessarily the question; instead, the point to be noted here is how different Frye is in the 1980s, when he is keenly aware of literary criticism and theory, and very much aware of how he is classed.

Towards the end of his career, when it was clear that literary theory had taken hold in the academy, Frye began to reflect on literary theory. In an interview with Deanne Bogdan, Frye laments, "I am feeling out of the great critical trends today," and further that "the man who's giving the Alexander Lectures this year has four; he's addressed one lecture to deconstructionists, one to Marxists, one to the formalists, one to something else. Now, none of this includes me. I'm totally out of fashion" (24.805). The man in question was Jerome McGann, "whose published Alexander Lectures had the title *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work*" (24.1158 n. 25). Northrop Frye was right that he was "out of fashion," both in terms of his own theories and his place in literary theory; however, he did seek to reverse the course. Frye hoped to reclaim literary studies from deconstruction, which had become, in a sense, his chief opponent, much as Harold Bloom has quipped that he is responsible for the criticism in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, which featured chapters by Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller.

In his notebooks on renaissance literature, Northrop Frye suggested:

My function as a critic right now is to reverse the whole 'deconstruction' procedure, which leads eventually to the total extinction of both literature and criticism: people are naturally attracted first, and most, by the suicidal and the destructive. One should turn around to reconstruction, which is a matter of seeing a narrative in its undisplaced form as a single complex metaphoric. (20.302)

Frye's discomfort was with the deconstructive turn in literary studies, and consequently he argued against deconstruction. In an interview with Loretta Innocenti, when asked about nihilism and literary theory, he responded: "[t]he deconstructionists will have to speak for themselves, but I think the 'anything goes' stage is headed

for the dustbin already” (24.828).

Frye, it must be admitted, did not save his criticism for deconstruction alone; he was certainly disappointed, if not altogether dismissive, of feminist literary criticism:

I find feminist criticism most interesting when it's an aspect of social history. The main principles of its specifically literary criticism are disappointing; they're quickly exhausted and don't sustain any novel or challenging interest. I'd much prefer to believe that it represented as new and important a dimension of sensibility as you suggest, but I haven't found it so, even if that is a statement only about me. (24.845)

Frye recognized that “a homosexual scholar may find his contact in the particular kind of sensibility that a homosexual writer often has”, although he cautioned that such a criticism is “barbaric” because it assumes that only writers of a certain “sensibility” could understand one another. The problem, for Frye, is that a criticism such as feminism, queer theory, or postcolonialism (Frye only ever commented on feminism), is based on a politics of exclusion “[t]hat breaks up the community of verbal
90 imagination into a group of exclusive cliques” (27.395).

Frye believed that criticism which had to be “to be ‘based on’ something else, carried around in some kind of religious or Marxist or Freudian wheelchair” (27.312) was an ideological, rather than a mythological, approach to literature.⁶ Ideology was not a primary concern, but a secondary concern. That is, literature precedes ideology; however, it should be clear that Frye’s intention, even in his attempt to “reverse the whole ‘deconstruction’ procedure” (20.302), was never about displacing (or erasing) ideology and literary theory. Jonathan Hart explains that “Frye’s view that literature is a critique of ideology is a counterbalance for all the theorists today who assert that literature is ideology” (210). Hart further demonstrates that for Frye, “literature is a subversive means of opposing the dominant ideology and the class structure that supports it, so that he takes a different tack from those who proclaim the powerlessness of literature and the ineffectiveness of the imagination before the material forces of the world” (210). Frye does not so much stand in opposition to deconstruction and feminism, as he argues for a “double vision,” which recognizes the importance of literature and the ideologies that inform its criticism.

Above all, and the point with which I shall conclude here, is that Frye was a dialectical thinker, as so many Frygians have demonstrated, most notably Brian Russell Graham in his recent work, *The Necessary Unity of Opposites: The Dialectical Thinking of Northrop Frye*. It is certainly true that Frye was dismissive of “the deconstructive critical mind [which] is some hazy analogy with atom-smashing: eventually we’ll break down my cross accumulations of rhetoric into protons, hadrons, quarks” (5.367). Frye was opposed to deconstruction—but deconstruction cannot be understood to be the totality of literary criticism; indeed, the particular is not the universal in this case—however, we would be remiss if we came to understand Frye as anti-theory; after all, Frye was, at least following Calin, “the first major theoretician” (118). Frye’s concern was that theory (ideology) must be informed by its primary concerns: mythology. The two cannot exist in isolation, just as one cannot complete a cen-

trifugal reading of literature, instead “these two modes of understanding take place simultaneously in all reading” (22.67-68).

Northrop Frye explains that “for the last fifty years, I have been studying literature, where the organizing principles are myth, that is, story, narrative, and metaphor, that is, figurative language” (4.178). For Frye, myth is distinct from ideology, along the same lines as primary concerns—“food, sex, property, and freedom of movement” (4.170)—and secondary concerns, which include, “our political, religious, and other ideological loyalties” (4.170). Frye further explains:

If we read a story there is no pressure to believe in it or to act upon it; if we encounter metaphors in poetry, we need not worry about their factual absurdity. Literature incorporates our ideological concerns, but it devotes itself mainly to the primary ones, in both physical and spiritual forms: its fictions show human beings in the primary throes of surviving, loving, prospering, and fighting with the frustrations that block these things. (4.178)

For Frye, literature is necessarily devoted to primary concerns, but most inherently “incorporates our ideological concerns.” Frye’s concerns regarding literary theory are not the use of literary theory, but rather are about the loss of the primary concerns of literature, which attend to the mythological framework of literature. What is literature without the literary or literariness? A literary theory that cannot attend to how poems are connected, for Frye, cannot achieve a vision of literature as a system. Thus, it is not about asking who or what is absent from the canon or tradition, but how those who are missing fit into the canon, tradition, and literary history.

Even though Frye may have felt that his “function as a critic right now is to reverse the whole ‘deconstruction’ procedure” (20.302), it does not seem that his greater goal is to temper the rise of literary theory in the academy. Northrop Frye may be many things, but he should not be situated alongside Harold Bloom in arguing against the School of Resentment (at least not without some reservation). O’Grady’s perspective that Frygian theory should, because of its inclusiveness, “endear Frye to the various postmodernist, feminist, or post-colonial critics” (227) is to the point. But, the goal, and this is something that Frygian scholars must attend to, is not to destroy literary theory, by which one might mean ideology altogether, but rather to unify the seemingly polarizing positions of primary concerns, such as the mythological framework of literature, and the secondary concerns of ideology. What might Frye’s theories of literature, for instance, offer affect theory? Or, what would it mean to queer Frye’s own theories? On this latter question, we might think of Peter Dickinson’s *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* (1999), which responds to Frye’s question, “Where is here?” (12.346) and which puts “the social rhetorics of Northrop Frye” alongside “the gay and lesbian activist organization Queer Nation” (Dickinson 3). Frye’s vitality is dependent upon an engagement with new ideas; or, put another way, what might the new directions be in Frye Studies? Could we not imagine the Green World in tandem with eco-criticism? These questions, of course, are unanswered here, but could well be asked of Frye’s scholars.

Northrop Frye's anxieties about literary theory are not motivated by a fear or hatred of literary theory, but rather about a fear of the loss of literature to literary theory. This may be a minor difference, but it is, nevertheless, a significant difference. For Frye, literary criticism must necessarily recognize the mythological and the ideological; these two poles cannot be isolated. Frye was as worried about New Criticism as he was about the deconstructionist perspective. Indeed, some twenty-five years after Frye's death, one is curious to know what Frye would think of literary studies today. Would Frye agree with Warkentin and Hutcheon's observation about his "literary openness" (13), or would he regret the rise of literary theory? Ultimately, this is a question that may be of interest to scholars and certainly seems to be of interest to those who follow Frye; however, Frye's verdict on literary theory would be, in many ways, an anti-Frygian act. Frye argued against the "ultra-critical joker" (22.24) who determines what is "good" and what is "bad." Northrop Frye may very well be the "first major theoretician" (Calin 118), but his contribution ought not to be read in the

92 agonistic spirit of some critics. Nor should we simply accept the laudations of devotees of Frye. Frye was a complex figure in literary history, especially now with the publication of his private writings, which have shifted and affected how critics think about, respond to, and engage his work. Frye remains, without doubt, an important voice in the history of literary theory—if only because his writings have influenced so many responses—and his contribution should not be dismissed; it should, however, be read carefully and closely, with a keen interest in advancing, to borrow from Frye, "new directions from old" (21.307-21).

NOTES

1. It is worth noting here that the relation between Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom is perhaps one of the most interesting in literary theory of the twentieth century because of how indebted they are to one another. It is also interesting because it is the relation that most often divides Frye scholars. Robert D. Denham's *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World* opens with a letter written by Frye to Denham, which reads (in part): "I think what mostly bothers [Harold Bloom] about my present books is that a religious position seems to be emerging, both in *The Critical Path* and *The Secular Scripture*" (1). For Bloom's own perspective, see his introduction to the Princeton edition of *Anatomy of Criticism*, in which he admits "a certain ambivalence" about praising Frye. For scholarly studies of the relation, see Polansky's "A Family Romance—Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom: A Critical Study" (1981); my "Anatomies of Influence, Anxieties of Criticism: Northrop Frye & Harold Bloom" (2009); and, to a lesser extent, Alistair Hey's *The Anatomy of Bloom: Harold Bloom and The Study of Influence and Anxiety* (2014).
2. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, from Northrop Frye are taken from the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, documented by volume and page number.
3. For more significant treatments of the entire work of Frye, see A.C. Hamilton's *Northrop Frye: Anatomy of His Criticism* (1990); Jonathan Hart's *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination* (1994); and Robert D. Denham's *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World* (2004). For a biography of Northrop Frye, see John Ayre's *Northrop Frye: A Biography* (1989).
4. For a history of the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, see Alvin A. Lee's "The Collected Works of

Northrop Frye: The Project and the Edition" (2009).

5. For discussions of the private writings of Northrop Frye, which includes his diaries, notebooks, and fiction, see *Rereading Frye: The Published and Unpublished Works* (1999), edited by David Boyd and Imre Salusinszky.
6. Further studies on Northrop Frye and mythological thinking include Ford Russell's *Northrop Frye on Myth* (2000), and Glen Robert Gill's *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth* (2006).

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