Frye Unschooled: Mythopoeic Modernism in Canada

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The relationship between Northrop Frye and the group of poets sometimes known as the Frye School¹ has been of enough critical interest over the last half-century to produce a significant, if fragmented, body of work on the subject. While it has not received the attention paid to earlier Canadian modernist poetry,² the Toronto-based mythopoeic tradition has been addressed by some of Canada's most prominent critics, who begin to note the distinctive character of this tradition in the 1950s. Appraisals of the Frye School generally fall into three camps: critics note the emergence of a mythopoeic tradition in mid-century Toronto but do not tie it directly

- 1 The term "School of Frye" seems to have been first used in a work of criticism by Milton Wilson in 1959, but he uses it as an alternative to "School of Pratt," suggesting that the mid-century mythopoeic tradition is rooted as much in earlier Canadian poetry as it is in Frye. Kokotailo and Jones make a similar argument.
- 2 While there are sustained studies of Canadian modernism in the 1920s (Brian Trehearne's Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists), 1930s (including Candida Rifkind's Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada), and the 1940s (Brian Trehearne's The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition), no full-length study of the 1950s, which would by necessity focus on the poets associated with the Frye School, has yet been undertaken.

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to Frye,³ they argue that this tradition emerges explicitly because of Frye's influence, 4 or they challenge Frye's influence as the crucial factor leading to the tradition's emergence.⁵ But despite the continued interest of this topic to critics, the coeval development of Frye's archetypal criticism and the highly mythic poetic praxis of the writers grouped under the Frye School banner, a moment that marks a distinctive shift in the character of Canadian modernist poetry, has never been fully explored or adequately explained. The recent republication of many of the essays on the relationship between Frye and this group in *Northrop Frye's Canadian Literary* Criticism and Its Influence (2009), as well as the publication of this special issue to mark Frye's one-hundredth birthday, marks this as an appropriate moment to survey the state of critical work on mythopoeic modernism in Canada and illuminate the significant aspects of its development that still require further inquiry.

Frye protests on more than one occasion that "There is no such thing as a Frye school of poetry" ("Frye" 9), but while the term "school" indicates a degree of organization and close affiliation of the poets that has never existed a significant tradition of mythopoeic poetry does emerge in lateforties Toronto and gains strength during the period that Frye writes his "Letters in Canada" series of reviews for the *University of Toronto Quarterly* (1950 to 1959). For the Toronto poets, mythmaking is the central topic and technique of their poetic production from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s,

- 3 This understanding of modernist mythopoeic poetry in Canada was prominent in essays written during the 1950s and early 1960s as the tradition emerged as a definable entity; essays include those by Dudek ("Patterns"), Beattie ("Poetry"), Frye ("Poetry"), and Pacey ("Literature").
- 4 Very little work is done on the mythography of the Toronto 1950s during the 1960s, with the exception of Bowering's essay on Reaney, which is intensely concerned with the idea of influence. However, when a number of Frye's poetstudents (especially Jones, Mandel, and Atwood, who get nicknamed the "Small Frye") begin publishing their own works of mythic or thematic criticism, a renewed interest and belief in Frye's influence over these writers as poets as well as theorists leads to the publication of essays by Djwa, Jackel, Sparshott, and Sullivan in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They lay the ground for more recent essays by Bennett and Brown that argue, in increasingly strong terms, for Frye's influence as the major reason for the emergence of the Canadian modernist mythopoeic tradition.
- 5 Those with the closest relationship to Frye are the least likely to find his influence a convincing explanation for the mythopoeic character of mid-century modern Canadian poetry. Some of his students—Atwood ("Northrop"), Mandel ("Introduction"), and Jones ("Myth")—as well as George Woodcock ("Diana's"), Frye's colleague in Canadian criticism, challenged the idea of influence when it became the dominant critical narrative in the 1970s and 1980s but have not done so since.

and it continues to interest many for the length of their careers. The list of poets associated with the Frye School varies, but Jay Macpherson, James Reaney, Douglas Le Pan, Daryl Hine, Wilfred Watson, Eli Mandel, Margaret Atwood, and D. G. Jones are most often included; Dennis Lee, Anne Wilkinson, and Gwendolyn MacEwen are occasionally counted part of the group. For most of the middle of the twentieth century, these poets are some of the most highly praised and often awarded⁶ in Canadian literature, and critical overviews of the decade invariably point to the interest in myth as its defining characteristic. Most critics interested in the relationship between the Toronto poets and Frye rely on a model of influence to explain the "obsession with mythography" (Beattie 329) that the fifties poets share, arguing that they absorbed Frye's ideas and structures as students⁸ or as suggestible readers and then spent their literary careers "converting Frye's literary theory into poetry" (Brown 283). While this model has obvious attractions, it fails to situate the work of Frye and the fifties poets within their larger literary and cultural contexts and discounts the rootedness of Frye's critical work in his reading of Canadian mythopoeic poetry, some of which emerged before the publication of his major critical works.

Frye's dismissal of the existence of a Frye School is both an expression of humility and a question of the label's accuracy. As either a concept or a label, I argue, it fails to account for the work of poets who were never schooled in mythopoeia by Frye and for the general modernist interest in mythography in which the Toronto poets, and Frye himself, participate. A recognition of the limitations of the idea of the Frye School as well as the creation of some more accurate alternatives are both necessary. To this end, I refer to the Frye School when addressing influence-based conceptions of the mythopoeic poets as a group. Otherwise, I refer to them as the mythopoeic poets, the Toronto poets, or the fifties poets. These labels

- 6 The Governor General's Award for poetry (known as the Canada Council Award before 1958) went to one of the mythopoeic poets ten out of the twenty years between 1949 and 1968.
- 7 See the "Field Work" section of this paper, as well as Desmond Pacey's "Literature of the Fifties," Monroe Beattie's "Poetry 1950-1960," and Frye's "Poetry."
- 8 Frye's teaching—his students included Macpherson, Mandel, Reaney, and Atwood (who was also Macpherson's student)—would of course have been a contributing factor in his students' mythopoeic development and is one that must be explored. However, as my analysis of Wilkinson's work evidences, the mythopoeia of poets who are not Frye's student develops in remarkably similar ways; the factors that inform their mythopoeic development must also be recognized to inform that of his students. On Frye and education, see also *The* Great Teacher: Northrop Frye, Remembering Frye, and Northrop Frye's Writing on Education.

artificially, and often falsely, limit the group by poetic interest, geography, or chronology, but in de-emphasizing Frye, these labels make room for a more nuanced and comprehensive reading of the Toronto poets' mythopoeic development.

An assessment of the current criticism on Frye and the Toronto poets reveals significant gaps in our understanding of how the Canadian modernist mythopoeic tradition emerges. If, as Frye argues, there is no Frye School and his influence cannot fully account for the pervasiveness of myth-based poetry in 1950s Toronto, a critical model that looks beyond influence is necessary. A new model, I argue, should read the mythopoeia of the Toronto fifties—in particular, the mythic vision these writers share of a universe made coherent and whole through the totalizing, apocalyptic gaze of the artist—not only as a response to Frye as theorist and teacher but also as a reaction to the changed character of the postwar modern world in Canada and beyond and to the formal and aesthetic concerns of literary modernism. I model this expanded critical vision in a reading of some of the mythopoeic poetry of Anne Wilkinson, who was never Frye's student and who began writing and publishing mythic poetry before Frye began publicly articulating his theories of literature and myth. This reading of Wilkinson's work reveals that the Canadian modernist mythopoeic tradition emerges before Frye's rise to prominence, provides an example of the local mythopoeia in which Frye understands his theory to be rooted, suggests some of the non-Frygian factors that inform the development of the mythopoeic tradition, and begins situating Canadian modernist mythopoeia in relationship to the larger international modernist interest in the poetics of myth at mid-century. In unschooling Frye—moving beyond the idea of the Frye School and his influence as the major explanation for the emergence of the Canadian mythopoeic modernist tradition—this more expansive critical vision can illuminate the reciprocal relationship between Frye and the fifties poets, the particularities of their mythopoeic practice, and the roots of Frye's theory in its Canadian and modernist contexts.

9 Ideally, any name for this group as a whole will avoid distinguishing between poetic and theoretical mythographers, as I argue that their writing of myth transcends generic boundaries, and many of them wrote in a number of genres. However, this essay by necessity retains the distinction between Frye as theorist and the others as poets in order to address a critical history that is invested in doing the same.

"Norrie is the Sun": Frye at the Centre

Branko Gorjup's volume Northrop Frye's Canadian Literary Criticism and Its Influence collects for the first time many of the critical considerations of Frye's relationship to the Toronto poets. Unsurprisingly, considering the prominence of "influence" in its title, a significant number of these essays, including those by Francis Sparshott, Rosemary Sullivan, George Bowering, and Russell Brown, insist that the Toronto poets are interested in myth and archetype almost exclusively because they are influenced by Frye as a critic, theorist, and teacher. Most considerations of the links between Frye's theory and modern Canadian poetry take the same critical position, including those by Sandra Djwa, David Jackel, and Milton Wilson not collected in Gorjup's volume. Examining some of these essays reveals that the idea of influence is often attractive to critics not because it accurately reflects the relationship between Frye and the poets but because it holds some other appeal or serves some other critical function. This examination also illuminates the critical gaps left in studies of Canadian mythopoeic modernism—which includes Frye's work—when he is positioned as the centre of the mythopoeic tradition.

One attraction of the influence model is Frye's enduring reputation as one of Canada's most prominent and internationally recognized public intellectuals; placing Frye at the centre of the Frye School serves to reinforce his importance to Canadian culture. Marshall McLuhan once remarked that "Norrie is not struggling for his place in the sun. Norrie is the sun" (quoted in Kostelanetz 441). In consequence, the influence model implies, the Toronto poets are pulled toward mythopoeia by Frye's overpowering gravity. 10 McLuhan's sun metaphor gets picked up in characterizations of Frye's relationship to the poets. Bowering's alternative to Frye School is "Fryed poets" (48), a label that suggests the Toronto poets are not so much touched by Frye's beneficent intellectual light as burnt by it. 11 As Djwa writes, "Frye's example encouraged an interest in archetype ... that

- 10 The context of this remark by McLuhan is now unknown, but it aptly captures a major perspective on Frye's relationship to Canadian criticism and literature. Also see Kokotailo.
- 11 Bowering sets up the division between "Fryed poets" and "raw poets" along the lines of the oft-invoked cosmopolitan versus native divide made prominent by Smith, Sutherland, and Frye (see Kokotailo) and implicit in much of Dudek's criticism. However, Bowering's terminology suggests that he also has Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of myth *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) in mind. This connection reinforces a reading of the Toronto poets as reflecting an international interest in mythology during the same period.

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radiated out from his lectures and writing on Blake to the myth-centred poetry of Eli Mandel, James Reaney, and Jay Macpherson" ("Where" 17; emphasis added). These characterizations of the poet-theorist relationship, including Brown's image of the poets converting theory into poetry like plants turning sunlight into energy, tend to elide the particularity, diversity, and consciousness of the fifties poets' approaches to mythography, instead implying that it is an unconscious, naturalized, and inevitable response to encountering Frye.

The image of Frye as sun, as the example from Djwa demonstrates, is often paired with the image of Frye as teacher. The oft-referenced Frye School or "School of Frye" (Wilson 202) suggests, in a punning fashion, that the mythopoeic group is understood as a product of Frye's schooling as much as it is seen as a school of poets in the traditional sense. The line between poet and teacher is certainly easier for critics to trace than the line between poet and theorist. As Eli Mandel argues, "It is difficult if not impossible to know to what extent a critic moves poets" (18). Frye himself consistently discounts his influence: as well as dismissing the existence of a Frye School, he also argues that he does not "think a critic directly influences poetry" ("Frye" 5). Even so, the large number of mythopoeic poets who were Frye's students, and the indebtedness that some of them— Reaney and Macpherson in particular—publically claim to Frye makes his pedagogic influence an attractive explanation for Canadian modernist mythopoeia. Even George Woodcock, who is more skeptical than many of the influence model, concedes that "If Frye indeed wielded an influence over these poets ... it more probably came from his teaching" ("Diana's" 196). However, issues with the Frye School label become immediately apparent when we move from the image of Frye-as-teacher back to the list of mythmaking poets of the Canadian 1950s. It fails to account for the fact that a number of them, Anne Wilkinson and Gwendolyn MacEwen among the most important, were not Frye's students, may never have read his work, and had little contact with others considered part of the mythopoeic group. The interest these poets take in mythmaking must necessarily have other sources than Frye, some of which are suggested by proponents of the influence model even as they attempt to dismiss them.

Situating Frye at the centre of the fifties group allows critics to ignore the possibility that the Toronto poets are engaging with the work of other mythopoeic writers. These acts of dismissal suggest that the desire to connect Canadian mythopoeia exclusively to Frye emerges from an underlying cultural anxiety that fears placing the tradition in its international contexts. Russell Brown's conclusion to Gorjup's volume is typical of this perspective.

He argues strongly for Frye as the prime mover behind the emergence of a modern Canadian mythopoeic tradition, to the exclusion of any other writers: "Reaney found in Frye's theoretical work a handbook that furnished 'a giant critical focus' for poets ... That this was its effect on a number of Canadian writers then emerging is undeniable" (282). In Brown's mind, this accounts for "the prominence, in Canada, of myth as both topic and technique—well *after* the impact of the Joyce-Eliot infatuation with myth had run its course elsewhere" (282). Brown's quick dismissal of Eliot and Joyce, who are metonymic of a larger modernist interest in myth, suggests a lingering and unacknowledged anxiety about Anglo-American cultural influence which generally pervades criticism of Canadian modernism. As Brian Trehearne notes, "The placement of Canadian writing against the backdrop of international modernism is very rare" (Montreal 9) and this leaves significant critical gaps. However, he still avoids reading the poetry of the Montreal forties in relationship to major Anglo-American poets, and for reasons that suggest he shares Brown's anxiety about the diminishment of Canadian literature when placed next to its international counterparts. 12 In arguing that Frye is the primary, or even the only, reason that myth-based poetry dominates Canada in the 1950s, proponents of the influence model can safely shift attention away from the intense interest in myth among Anglo-American writers and critics—Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Yeats, Blake, H.D., Sir James Frazer, Joseph Frank, D.H. Lawrence, Robert Graves, C. Day-Lewis—right up to the 1950s, an interest that inevitably had an impact on the work of the Toronto poets as engaged readers of these writers. Bowering acknowledges the connection between Anglo-American mythopoeia and the work of the Toronto poets: he notes that they "may be said to descend ... from T.S. Eliot and Robert Graves" (40). However, he also feels the need to "bring it on home" (40) to Canada by arguing that their work descends not from Eliot and Graves directly, 13 but

- 12 Trehearne similarly avoids Eliot in his study of forties Canadian poetry. He argues that "the danger of my invoking such powerful examples as Eliot, Pound and Auden is that a 'great men' emphasis can cut us off from the byways of literary development, often more telling for local and particular traditions like the forties Canadian" (Montreal 56). I read this avoidance as an expression of cultural anxiety about a potential failure of Canadian literature to live up to the standards of such "powerful examples." This failure to situate Canadian modernism in relation to major works of Anglo-American modernism leaves a significant gap in understandings of the period.
- 13 This kind of thinking has discouraged a full examination of Macpherson's relationship to Graves, with whom she lived, studied, and published her first collection (Nineteen Poems, published in 1952). It is likely that Graves first suggested that she study with Frye.

"as those figures from an earlier time are reflected in the literary theory of Northrop Frye of the University of Toronto" (40)—mediated safely through the Canadian figure of Frye. By claiming a wholly Canadian influence on the work of the Toronto poets in the figure of Frye, Brown and Bowering can claim the work of the fifties poets—and by extension, Frye's work as part of this general mid-century interest in mythopoeia—as a distinctly Canadian phenomenon.

While this critical move is intended to reinforce the importance of Canadian mythopoeia, the continued association of mid-century mythography with Frye is largely responsible for its marginalization in studies of Canadian modernism. Frye's role as an academic and the association of the Frye School with the University of Toronto is important here, as this marginalization is at least in part precipitated by a reactionary anti-academic slant to criticism by the TISH poets in Vancouver and Louis Dudek in Montreal. As poets, Dudek, Bowering, and Frank Davey are proponents of a poetic that opposes the modernist centralization of power and ivorytower distance from everyday life that the academy represents, and this view continues to characterize their writing when they enter the academy themselves. Bowering argues that the work of the Toronto poets "has not had any noticeable influence on younger Canadian poets" (40) because of their "bookish isolation" (48), university audience, and tendency to take "literary criticism as an important source" (40). The only way he can legitimately write about Reaney, he suggests, is by arguing that Reaney is better than "any Northrop Frye Poet" (40) and therefore not one. bpNichol writes to Frank Davey—who starts as a TISH poet and is a vocal critic of Frye—about his need to justify that he "get[s] a lot out of what Reaney does & [thinks that] he's one of the poets everybody has to read" (128). 14 Nichol suggests that Reaney's reputation as a poet has been harmed by a prejudice against his "much touted background as a Frygian scholar" (128). His letter also suggests that the alignment Davey and his fellow critics have made between modernism, conservatism, and Frye's scholarly formalism force Nichol, as an experimental postmodernist poet, to justify an interest in Reaney's seemingly antithetical work. As Frye notes, Dudek criticizes his supposed advocacy of an "academic, erudite, repressed and Puritanical poetry, in contrast to another kind whose characteristics were undefined but which was assumed to be much more warm-hearted [and] spontaneous" (Bush viii). Bowering, Davey, and Dudek's self-association as poets with the latter tradition—attention to which dominates criti-

¹⁴ See Davey's "Surviving the Paraphrase."

cism of Canadian modernism in the work of Dudek and his students—has certainly contributed to the marginalization of the poetry of the 1950s. 15 More importantly, their continued alignment of mythopoeic poetry with Frye's academic formalism and structuralism has resulted in the work of the Toronto poets being swept up in the postmodernist and poststructuralist reaction against Frye's theories. While this marginalization has had a detrimental effect on understandings of the work of the Toronto poets, the gaps it leaves in critical considerations of Frye's work become evident when we move beyond the influence model.

"Field Work": Frye Among the Poets

While the idea of influence dominates discussions of Frye's relationship to the mythopoeic poets, some critics take a view that more closely aligns with Frye's understanding of his links to modern Canadian literature. This view is based not on influence but on reciprocity and confluence. Despite his continued association of modernist mythography with Frye, Dudek was of the first to note the overwhelmingly mythological character of 1950s poetry. Rather than arguing that it is limited to poets of the Frye School, he argues that mythmaking marks the work of most significant Canadian poets of the 1950s. While Dudek distinguishes between archetypal (Reaney, Wilkinson) and social realist (Acorn, Cohen, Purdy) mythopoeia, even in the work of the social realist poets "an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and in religion) leads to a primitive mythological effort to organize chaos" (414). Milton Wilson also argues that mythmaking is the common practice of most mid-century Canadian poets, and while "it is important to distinguish such conscious and thoroughgoing mythologists as James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, Wilfred Watson and Anne Wilkinson from those whose myth-making seems less a matter of direct endeavour than a part of their everyday cultural inheritance" (202), the practice is common to all. This shared conception of fifties poetry as generally mythopoeic suggests the potential for reconsidering the work of the Toronto poets and Frye's theory as part of the same mythic impulse—

¹⁵ As a critic and as an academic, Louis Dudek has shaped the course of criticism of Canadian modernism. Dudek's students at McGill and their students—Brian Trehearne, Wynne Francis, Ken Norris, Michael Gnarowski, and Dean Irvine have written nearly every major critical consideration of modern Canadian poetry, and they generally share his focus on Montreal and little magazine culture. Unsurprisingly, the poetry of the Toronto 1950s has not received significant attention from these writers; Irvine's Master's thesis and edition of Wilkinson's poems are an exception.

emerging from a larger mid-century mythopoeic tradition that includes, but does not originate from, Frye.

The influence model suggests that Frye's students should be the most indebted to him, but three of the poets most closely aligned with him (as his students and later as thematic critics) express strong reservations about the idea of his influence. Eli Mandel argues that "It is difficult if not impossible to know to what extent a critic moves poets" and that "along with," rather than as a product of, "Frye's contribution to the 'Letters In Canada' series ... a mythopoeic poetry of some power ... did develop" (18). Mandel also wants to avoid "claiming [the mythopoeic poets] as Frye's disciples" (18), as does Margaret Atwood, who wonders why, if Frye "exerted some odd Svengali-like influence on young writers, taking their putty-like minds and running them through the Play-Doh machine of his 'system' until they came out moulded," Canadian literature is not "filled up with a lot of zonked-out Trilbys ... all warbling Frye's tune" (400). D.G. Jones also argues strongly against the idea of influence. He identifies the image of the poet as a visionary "nth Adam" (Klein 638) as a thread that runs throughout Canadian literature and emerges in Frye's theory. As expressed by Canadian writers, the world is revealed in its totality by the writer's all-encompassing, perfected vision, and is unified and contained within his body. Under the poet's gaze the world becomes "his own body's chart" (639). As Jones argues, this poetic vision is "very like Frye's, that the imagination creates ... the myth within which men may live in communion with all life, within which all separate lives, nature's divided things, may find their identity with the whole of life" (8–9). Donna Bennett also identifies a tradition of visionary writing in Canada that is given critical expression by Frye's vision of the apocalyptic: "a world of total metaphor, in which every thing is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body" (Anatomy 136). 16 Jones argues that this conception of the visionary imagination does not originate with Frye. Rather, he suggests, "It was anticipated by the writers. As Frye would say, he found it in the literature of the world" (9). Jones then finds examples of this apocalyptic vision in the work of writers who precede or are wholly unconnected with Frye, including Wallace Stevens, A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, Ernest Buckler, and Gabrielle Roy.

Like Jones, George Woodcock argues against Frye as the genesis of Canadian mythopoeia. Rather, he sees the relationship between Frye and

¹⁶ Frye also defines apocalyptic as "the thematic term corresponding to 'myth' in fictional literature; metaphor as pure and potentially total identification, without regard to plausibility or ordinary experience" (*Anatomy* 365).

the Toronto poets as one of coincidence or confluence; he argues that a great part of Frye's unusual fame for a literary critic is because "he has been fortunate enough to advance his own theories on mythopoeic elements in literature just at a time when they coincided with the developing trend in Canadian writing" ("Diana's" 189). Frye's role as a critic is not to influence but, rather, to illuminate the poets' work: "Frye did not create a school of poets; he did stimulate a generation of poets by clarifying their poems for them" (195). Frye and the Toronto poets write in similar ways "not because he had any power to inspire them, but rather because, sharing their inspiration, he shaped it in rational form and made logic a mirror for the imagination" (195–96). Woodcock, among others, argues that Frye's criticism could productively be read as literary, not theoretical writing, 17 opening up the possibility for new readings of Frye's work as an example of 1950s literary mythopoeia.

Woodcock's perspective aligns most closely with Frye's own vision of his relationship to the Toronto poets. Frye characterizes his "Letters in Canada" reviews, which often treat the Toronto poets, "as episodes in a writing career which has been mainly concerned with world literature and has addressed an international reading public, and yet has always been rooted in Canada and has drawn its essential characteristics from there" (Bush i). For Frye, his writing on world literature, as well as his Canadian criticism, is rooted not only in Southern Ontario's physical soil but in its poetic. It is the reading of

Canadian poetry ... that first focused my attention on the extent to which my own environment had conditioned my critical and scholarly attitudes ... I have been very deeply aware of the kind of soil that I am rooted in and of the impossibility of my having developed as I did under any formative conditions other than those which I have encountered in southern Ontario. ("Critic" 6)

While current analyses of Frye's relationship to modern Canadian poetry tend to overemphasize the indebtedness of the poets to Frye while eliding their international contexts, the same analyses tend to underemphasize the indebtedness of Frye to the poets while eliding his national contexts. 18

¹⁷ See Woodcock's "Criticism and Other Arts" and Dudek's "Lunchtime Reflections on Davey's Defence of the Black Mountain Fort."

¹⁸ Djwa addresses the connections between Frye's theory and the poetry of E.J. Pratt at length in "Forays in the Bush Garden: Frye and Canadian Poetry," but

Frye himself is very aware of the necessity to address both; along with his recognition of his national contexts, he notes that the work of the Toronto poets should be read as part of a larger international mythopoeic tradition: "In the last chapter of [Fearful Symmetry] the conception emerges of three great mythopoeic periods of English literature: one around 1600, the age of Spenser, Shakespeare and the early Milton; one around 1800, the age of Blake and the great Romantics; and one around the period 1920–1950" (Bush vii). Frye is "fascinated to see how the echoes and ripples of the great mythopoeic age kept moving through Canada, and taking a form there that they could not have taken elsewhere" (Bush viii-ix), emerging as a particularly Canadian instantiation of an international tradition. Frye does not simply observe how the mythopoeic age moves through Canada; he sees his "Letters in Canada" reviews of 1950 to 1959 as "an essential piece of 'field work' to be carried on while I was working out a comprehensive critical theory" (viii). The theories of myth that Frye's develops in *Anatomy of Criticism* are only naturally informed by the mythopoeia that he is reading and reviewing as he writes. Considerations of Frye's theory need to assess the impact of this field work on Frye's thinking or, in other words, how Frye is schooled in mythopoeia by the poets associated with the Frye School. Unschooling Frye in large part means removing him from the centre and placing him among the poets—reading him not as the originator of the Canadian modernist mythopoeic tradition but as a participant in it. From this new vantage point, we can begin to assess how Frye's theories and the mythopoeic poetry of the Toronto poets develop in a reciprocal relationship. We can also begin to reveal the ways in which these writers are participants in a larger mythopoeic tradition that extends beyond Toronto.

Beyond Influence: Wilkinson as Mythopoet

The narrow vision that characterizes much criticism of Canadian modernist mythopoeia has left significant blind spots in critical understandings of the tradition's emergence. One of these is the inability of the influence model to account for the mythopoeia of Toronto poets like Anne Wilkinson who simply were not influenced by Frye. Unlike the poets consistently attached to the Frye School, Wilkinson is not often associated with any particular Canadian poetic tradition—George Woodcock sees her "stand[ing] in strange and tragic isolation, for her true affinities are

the same connections are almost never made between Frye's theory and the poetry of the fifties.

less with her Canadian contemporaries than with poets in other places and times" ("Introduction" 15).19 While he overemphasizes Wilkinson's isolation from currents of Canadian poetry (she comes to know most of the major poets of the time and helps to edit both *Here and Now* and *The* Tamarack Review), she is certainly not one of the "Fryed poets." Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that Wilkinson ever read or met Frye. 20 As Earle Birney once crudely characterized her, she is a "Tor[onto] housewife, without a univ[ersity] education" (quoted in Tightrope 9). Wilkinson's self-education, which Birney denigrates, forms the basis of an original and inventive mythography. Wilkinson's mythopoeia cannot be explained by tying it to Frye's influence, and yet it articulates the same vision of and potential for myth as do Frye and the writers most closely associated with him. Simply reading Wilkinson as a mythopoeic poet forces us to move beyond Frye's influence in accounting for the development of mythopoetics in Canada. As one of the earliest Canadian mythopoeic poets, Wilkinson's work also illuminates the mythopoeic characteristics Frye finds in modern Canadian poetry and articulates in his theory. I begin by reading Wilkinson as a mythographer in relationship to the work of Frye—the place where much criticism of Canadian mythopoeia ends—but expand this reading outward to consider her work in relationship to that of the other Toronto poets, earlier Canadian poets, and Anglo-American mythopoeic modernists. These are some of the many factors informing

- Simply reading Wilkinson as a mythopoeic poet forces us to move beyond Frye's influence in accounting for the development of mythopoetics in Canada.
- 19 The tendency of critics not to affiliate Wilkinson with the Frye School has had both a positive and a negative effect on her critical reputation; while the anti-academic critique of the "Fryed poets" by Dudek and the тіѕн group is certainly negative, it has still has the effect of consecrating the Frye School as a legitimate subject of critical attention and inquiry. As Wilkinson is not an academic, does not know or read Frye, and has never been accused of taking Frye's texts as her poetic scripture, her heretical brand of mythopoeia eludes this critical gaze. The influence model cannot account for Wilkinson's mythopoeia, and so it ignores it. Considering how completely it pervades her body of work, the lack of critical attention to Wilkinson's mythopoeia is still surprising. Most reviewers characterize her as a metaphysical poet—Frye calls some of her images "bad metaphysical poetry" (Bush 5)—but around the time her second collection is published, Frye and others occasionally begin to identify her work as "mythical and metaphorical poetry" (Bush 48).
- 20 Wilkinson kept a detailed reading list in her journals (see *The Tightrope Walker*). The only reference to Frye is as a reviewer of poems she submitted for a CBC broadcast, although it is likely that she did read his reviews of her work. Frye certainly read her, however—his first published review of her work is for "Letters in Canada: 1951," but he suggests that he has been reading her work for some time as she is "already fairly well known to readers of Canadian poetry" (5) from her periodical publications of 1946 onward.

the emergence of the Canadian mythopoeic modernist tradition to which a more nuanced and comprehensive critical vision must attend.

The idea of a personal mythology is a crucial element of a reconfigured reading of Canadian modernist mythopoeia that, rather than suggesting that the Toronto poets are "warbling Frye's tune" (Atwood 400), attends to the particularities of each poet's relationship to myth. Frye identifies in the work of every poet "a structure of imagery as typical of [the poet] as his [or her] handwriting" (Bush 179). Poems signed with that structure of imagery are the poet's "mythical poems, and they are for the critic the imaginative keys to his [or her] work" (Bush 179). Frye articulates this idea in a Canadian essay, "Preface to an Uncollected Anthology" (1956), but it emerges from his work on Blake, as identifying Blake's typical structure of imagery and unlocking its internal coherence allows Frye to contest the prevailing critical conception of Blake as "a mystic enraptured with incommunicable visions, standing apart, a lonely and isolated figure" (Fearful 3)—a description that echoes Woodcock's portrait of Wilkinson. While her isolation is just as mythical as Blake's, it has led to a reading of her work as unconnected to the rest of Canadian modernism. Finding the key to her personal mythology unlocks the ways in which her highly personal mythopoeia shares fascinating confluences with Frye's thinking. The centre of Wilkinson's personal mythology is a myth of total metamorphosis into and identification with the natural world; it recurs throughout her body of work—in poetry, writing for children (Swann and Daphne), and autobiography—often through echoes of the myth of Daphne. Bowering criticizes the mythopoeic poets for their "super-conscious and architectural" (41) mythmaking, but for Wilkinson images of mythic transformation are an expression of a relationship to the natural world that is intimate and highly personal. For Frye, the stories that mythopoeic poets believe are a "true" form not only a personal mythology but also a personal theology (Anatomy 64), and this is certainly the case for Wilkinson. Her personal mythology of transformation into the natural world is also her religion, her "Green Order ... Emotions that might have found an outlet in religion expressed themselves in a kind of nature worship. I could ... become at will grass, rock, water, weather as well.... Poetry, solitude, the country these were sufficient to produce a metamorphosis" (Tightrope 178). Her personal mythology and theology of transformation and metamorphosis takes shape long before Frye's rise to prominence.

Wilkinson's most powerfully mythopoeic poem is her oft-anthologized "The Red and the Green" (1951), which articulates her personal mythology of complete identification with nature in ways that illuminate her rela-

tionship to both Canadian and Anglo-American modernist mythopoeia. Wilkinson sets out on an inward journey to find her "blood" (94): she "walk[s] the hollow subway / Of the ear" (Heresies 94) toward her mind in search of "the lost red syllable" (94). This red syllable represents for Wilkinson the human and literary counterparts to the arboreal figures who people her Green Order. With the coming of spring, Wilkinson slips into her green skin:

Free from the cramp and chap of winter Skin is minstrel, sings Tall tales and shady Of the kings of Nemi Wood. (94)

As she journeys, she calls out to the kings of Nemi Wood, the bearers of the golden bough. As the title of his major work suggests, the death and rebirth of the Nemi king each spring is a central concern of Sir James Frazer; for Frazer, this death and rebirth centrifugally points to the cycle of death and resurrection that characterizes all mythology, Wilkinson's included. As Woodcock argues in "Diana's Priest in the Bush Garden," Frye's avid reading of Frazer necessarily informs the direction his own mythography takes, and, as Frye admits, his early study of "Theology for me was largely Frazer's Golden Bough" (Ayre 22). An examination of the Frazerian roots of Wilkinson and Frye's personal theologies share, and the shape that Frazer's writing has lent to modern literature generally, could illuminate the study of Canadian mythopoeia as it has Anglo-American mythography.21

The bearers of the golden bough represent not only Wilkinson's interest in Frazer and her desire to elude death by becoming part of this mythic cycle; they also represent her connection to a lineage of literary and mythic ancestors who are as tied to the Green Order as she. While she sings her tall tales, her mythopoeic poetry, Wilkinson continues to

> Walk an ancient path Wearing my warmth and singing The notes of a Druid song In the ear of Jack-in-the Green. (94)

21 See John Vickery's The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough, which Woodcock points to as a model for a new reading Frye's work (see "Diana's Priest in the Bush Garden") and I argue can do the same for Canadian mythopoeic poetry.

She has found members of her tribe not only in the kings of Nemi Wood, but in the Druids and in Jack-in-the Green, a descendant of the Nemi king who transforms into the green world through the tree costume he wears. Even so, her journey must continue, for she seeks not only green ancestors but green contemporaries. In this, she is seemingly unsuccessful:

But the quest turns round, the goal, My human red centre Goes whey in the wind, Mislaid in the curd and why of memory. (95)

Her human red centre, which represents both her human, untransformed self and a community of others who share her ability to both be red (human) and green (capable of total identification with the natural world) "goes whey in the wind." The only green compatriots she has are "mislaid in the curd and why of memory," for they exist only in the past as the druids, the bearers of the golden bough, and Jack-in-the-Green. Without a human community to connect her to her red centre, she cannot help but completely immerse herself in the Green Order, and her human self is lost. Wilkinson then becomes the memory-keeper for this lost tradition: "I gather rosemary," for remembrance, "And stitch the leaves / To green hearts on my sleeve" (95). She chooses to forget the lost red syllable, a living literary community of members of the Green Order, and remember her "green arteries" (95). Her "blood sings green, / From every heart a green amnesia rings" (95). The world has forgotten the tradition of transformation into the green world, the cycle of death and resurrection that Frazer and Frye argue are central to both myth and literature, in a bout of "green amnesia." As Wilkinson sang to her ancestors, she sings to herself as the last practitioner of this lost tradition.

While in "The Red and the Green" Wilkinson accomplishes her mythic identification with the Green Order, her earlier poem "Still Life" (1946) expresses desire without fruition. It is among the earliest expressions of her personal mythology and appears in *Contemporary Verse* before the publication of *Fearful Symmetry*. In the poem, Wilkinson longs for a full metamorphosis into her beloved green world: "I'd love this body more / If graved in rigid wood /...I'd cut it fresh in pine" (60). This transformation is one that fuses the human and the natural—

the little knots would show where muscles grew... The grain be quick to point The vein, be tendon's clue (60)

—while maintaining the particularity of each. This unity of the atomized many within the totalizing and unifying whole also characterizes Frye's vision of metaphorical and mythic identification. As he notes, "myth is an art of implicit metaphorical identity. The word 'sun-god' with a hyphen used instead of a predicate, is a ... literal metaphor" (*Anatomy* 137). As the sun-god is simultaneously sun and god in this literal metaphor, Wilkinson as tree-woman never fully loses her identity in either but becomes a hybrid figure that binds the two states of being. In his reading of Blake, Frye comes to believe that mythopoeia is "designed to transform [the world] into the world of human desire" (Fearful 6). Wilkinson's mythopoeic world expresses a vision of transformative desire where she herself is transformed, where she could

Bind my fluid form To forest tree, Be still and let its green blood Enter me. (Heresies 60)

Wilkinson's desire is an expression of her highly personal mythology, but when read in light of Frye's criticism, it has the potential to transform more than her own body; it can transform the human relationship to the natural world. The potential of this desire becomes clearer when we place Wilkinson's personal mythology within its larger critical and poetic contexts.

While Wilkinson laments that only her blood sings green, Bennett and Jones suggest the Adamic, apocalyptic vision that transforms the poet into landscape is one of the common threads that run throughout Canadian mythopoeic writing. A reading of Wilkinson's "A Poet's-Eye View" (1948) alongside Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" (1948) and Frye's Canadian essay "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts" (1977) illuminates the participation of Wilkinson's personal mythology in the larger tradition of Canadian mythopoeia and the transformative potential of this mythology, which Frye articulates in "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts" (1977). He argues that Canada's early European settlers bring with them the idea of the Cartesian egocentric consciousness—a rigid divide between human consciousness and the unconsciousness of nature. This split is exacerbated by the terror of nature that Frye argues in his 1943 review of A. J. M. Smith's anthology is the defining characteristic of Canadian poetry (Bush 139), a

terror Frye associates with the feeling that entering Canada is being swallowed into the belly of a leviathan (128). The only way to escape this terror, to breach the divide between the human and the natural, and to make Canada feel like home is through mythology, for "mythology ... is essentially the humanizing of nature" (126). The nature of myth and metaphor, to identify but not to fuse, is important here: Wilkinson's transformation into a tree-woman demonstrates how myth can simultaneously make the human natural and the natural human, bridging the psychological divide between.

In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," the poet's Adamic, apocalyptic vision writes the landscape on "his body's own chart" (Klein 639) so that the poet becomes the land. Frye's apocalypse is "the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal body" (Anatomy 119). In Klein's poem, this eternal body is the eye, and the body, of the visionary poet. Wilkinson experiences the same apocalyptic vision in "A Poet's-Eye View" when she, like the nth Eve to Klein's nth Adam, also begins to "[take] a green inventory" (Klein 638) of the world. What she sees is that "You are earth, loam, actual fields / And we are the green reed growing from your body... // who grow our down roots deep in you" (Heresies 59). For Frye, the apocalyptic is also "the thematic term corresponding to 'myth' in fictional literature" and both are "metaphor as pure and potentially total identification" (Anatomy 365), and Wilkinson's apocalyptic vision sees the human identified with the earth's leviathan body and the split between human and natural erased by our rootedness in the land. We are so much a part of the infinite body of nature that "we, the green ones, laugh and add an inch / For each storm's death" (Heresies 59). Rather than feeling terror at the unconscious power of weather, in their mythic transformation into the "green ones," the poets can embrace its power to nurture their growth. For Wilkinson, Klein, and Frye, the poet's eye view sees a world where human, plant, and planet are connected and transformed into a single infinite body—the inevitable and necessary mythopoeic response to the terror provoked by the modern world.

While an examination of Wilkinson's mythic, apocalyptic identification with the natural world can effectively situate her poetry in relationship to Frye's work and to Canadian mythopoeia more generally, it can also productively locate Canadian mythography within a larger Anglo-American modernist context. Frye's conception of the humanizing function of mythopoeia is articulated as a particularly Canadian response to the northern landscape, but it is an idea that transcends national boundaries. Indeed, it is mirrored closely in the work of American critic Joseph

Frank, particularly his three-part essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945). Frank claims that a mythopoeic response to the terrors of the natural world, and to the disorienting fragmentation of the modern world, is "the peculiarly modern quality" (652) of all modernist writing. He argues that "when the relationship between man and the universe is one of disharmony and disequilibrium, we find that non-naturalistic, abstract styles are always produced" (647). People who live in terror of the natural world—Frye's Canadian poet—"would take no pleasure in an objective presentation of the organic: the world of their ordinary experience is a world of fear, and the representation of this world in art would merely intensify their terror" (647). The terrorized writer avoids naturalistic representation of the world he or she fears, and instead "reduces the appearances of the natural world to linear-geometrical forms" (653). In Canadian literature, these forms appear as Reaney's endless circles in "Search for an Undiscovered Alphabet" (1965), Frye's mandalas, and the all-encompassing circle of the apocalyptic gaze and the Adamic body that recurs throughout Canadian mythopoeic poetry. Frank argues that these linear-geometric forms are represented as lines and shapes in visual art but take the form of the "timeless world of myth" (653) in literature. Frye also notes in his 1955 review of Wilkinson that "'modern' poets use myth, metaphor, and apocalyptic imagery just as 'modern' painters use abstract or stylized patterns" (Bush 45). These patterns or forms "have the stability, the harmony and the sense of order" (Frank 647) that Beattie and Wilson point to as a central characteristic of Canadian mythopoeia. This sense of stability and harmony certainly characterizes Frye's highly ordered theoretical work. In Frank's view, reference to myth allows writers to "maintain a continual juxtaposition between aspects of the past and present, in such a way that both are fused in one comprehensive view" (652), a statement that very closely echoes Frye's conception of the revelatory apocalyptic vision that comprehends everything within an infinite body.

The search for fusion and identification that characterizes Frank's spatial form, Frye's apocalyptic vision, and Wilkinson's mythic transformation is also echoed in Brian Trehearne's idea of integritas, a term he takes from Joyce and applies to the search for unity and order that characterizes the work of the Canadian forties poets. Trehearne defines integritas as "a concept of wholeness that would ... be in some way identifiable with the things contained—images, concepts, and so on—as is the water bead's surface tension with the water itself" (Montreal 67). The unity of integritas, a container that is identified with its contents, is the same unity that characterizes Frye's apocalyptic vision. These confluences—between Frye, This sense of stability and harmony certainly characterizes Frye's highly ordered theoretical work.

Frank, the work of the Anglo-American modernists in whose work takes this spatial form,²² the Montreal poets of the Canadian 1940s, and the mythopoeic poets of the Toronto 1950s—suggest that the defining characteristics of the work of the Toronto poets are not particularly Canadian, nor are they outside the mainstream of the Canadian literary tradition. Rather, these shared lines of thought suggest that the fifties poets, and Frye as a mythopoeic theorist, are participating in a wider modernist mythopoeic tradition that the narrowness of the influence model has disguised.

As even this brief reading of Wilkinson's work demonstrates, the emergence and establishment of a Canadian modernist mythopoeic tradition is much more complex than the reductive Frye School label suggests. Wilkinson's apocalyptic vision aligns closely with that of Frye and the other Toronto poets, and yet she arrives there without ever having read Frye—a circumstance which forces an examination of the contexts out of which her mythopoeia emerges, contexts which are equally important for the other Toronto poets, and for Frye himself. This reading of Wilkinson is only a start. An expanded critical vision of Canadian modernist mythopoeia should more closely consider how each of the fifties poets makes use of myth to make a fragmented and dehumanizing world coherent and whole, to access the spiritual, to shape and transform the world through art, and to enter into and align themselves with an international community of writers who are interested in the poetics of myth. Frye's relationship to the writers he taught and reviewed is a significant part of this story, but it is only one context of many to which critics must attend. They can do so in moving beyond the idea of the Frye School and the influence model that goes alongside it, embracing instead a critical vision that can encompass the complexity of this tradition.

Frye Unschooled

Unschooling Frye—liberating him from the centre of the Canadian mythopoeic solar system and from the head of the Victoria College classroom while simultaneously releasing the Toronto poets from their orbit around him—is a necessary act of critical revision. The longstanding identification of Frye with the Frye School has served to keep the modern Canadian mythopoeic tradition in critical view, but, unlike Frye's all-encompassing apocalyptic vision, this view has been markedly narrow. Reducing the rela-

²² Frank's theory is indebted to the criticism of T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, and Wilhelm Worringer. He finds literary manifestations of spatial form in the work of Djuna Barnes, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust, all of whom were read by the Toronto poets.

tionship between Frye and modern Canadian mythopoeia to one of influence—of transmission, reception, conversion, and repetition—upholds Frye's significance as a Canadian public intellectual but allows for the aversion of the critical gaze away from Frye's schooling in the work of the fifties poets, the particularity of Canadian mythopoeic poetic practice, its relationship to both earlier and later Canadian modernisms, and its place within international traditions of mythopoeic modernism. Discarding the influence model not only makes room within the circle of critical vision for unacknowledged mythographers like Wilkinson. It also allows Canadian mythic modernism—as both poetry and theory—to be identified with the larger landscape of modernist literary and theoretical practice while maintaining its integritas as a particularly Canadian phenomenon. Unschooling Frye makes possible a new apocalyptic critical vision that can fully comprehend the form of Canadian modernist mythopoeia.

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