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### **Anatomizing History and Historicizing *Anatomy*: Northrop Frye and Historiography**

Since *Anatomy of Criticism*, critics and theorists have taken contradictory views of Northrop Frye's use of history. For instance, in 1965 Frank Kermode tempered his admiration for Frye with an assertion that Frye's criticism is repressive and does not differentiate abstractions from the existential now of a work clearly enough. Kermode's objection is basically that Frye does not distinguish adequately between the texture of each text and its historical difference:

What makes literature different is, roughly, a different reality principle, appropriate . . . to *this* time as myth was appropriate to *that* time. The difference between *illud tempus* and *hoc tempus* is simply willed away in Frye's critical system, but it is essential to the very forms of modern literature, and to our experience of it. (120)

The legacy of Leavis and the New Critics provided grounds of resistance to Frye's systemization. At the English Institute meetings of 1966, Murray Krieger assumed Frye's regard for history, whereas W. K. Wimsatt did not (Krieger 11, 14; Wimsatt 97-99, 107). At the same meetings, Geoffrey Hartman saw Frye's greatest contribution as his demystification and democratization of literature and criticism. But he has reservations about Frye. Hartman suspects that Frye has demonstrated that myth is historical and not displaced. He argues that Frye's criticism differs from historicism to a greater degree than some would admit. Although Hartman insists that temporality and authenticity are elements

of the relation of words to the place of utterance, he does not want to return to conventional literary history where the historical expert decodes the allusions ("Ghostlier Demarcations" 109-31). In 1983, Terry Eagleton could persist in the position that Frye was a formalist (Eagleton, "Literary Theory" 91-94, 199, 204, 224-5; see Wimsatt's critique of Frye esp. 79-82).<sup>1</sup>

Most recently, A. C. Hamilton (1990) has discussed what he thinks might be the most polemical act in *Anatomy*—Frye uses an essay on historical criticism that provides a "total literary history" to introduce the body of his poetics (Hamilton 45, see 47-80). Like Blake, Frye views history as the total form of human culture, so that those critics who think of history as being linear tend to consider Frye anti-historical. Whereas Hamilton discusses Frye's examination of the historical context of literature through the first two essays in *Anatomy*—the one discusses modes and the historicity of literature while the other examines symbols and the contemporary relevance of literature—I concentrate on Frye's historicism in the "Tentative Conclusion" and how that relates to his career and to other critics (see 80). Hamilton himself suggests ways in which Frye's post-*Anatomy* work fits into the historical context of contemporary literary theory. Most importantly, Frye's criticism is a product of the 1950s and therefore helps to generate later theories while it is synchronically historical and, being post-nothing, might speak to the future. For Hamilton, Frye's critique begins with historical criticism but must end with rhetorical criticism (216-19; see 193-223). Although, like Hamilton, I wish to see new historicism take into account Frye's cultural poetics, it is quite possible that new historicists would insist on placing history before rhetoric in what might otherwise be a non-hierarchical relation in poetics (see Hamilton 221-23). New historicism might also rediscover philosophy from the inside as Frye does, but Hamilton may have misplaced hopes in the new historicists' putative return to Frye because it is unlikely that new historicists will give up the rhetorical philosophy of Derrida, a kind of bottom-up and outsider's satirical view of philosophical systems (see Hart, *Northrop Frye*). The metaphor of metaphors cuts both ways. Frye's historicity redeems itself on its own terms. The anxiety of future influence haunts each dying generation at its song, but each singing school makes its own contribution to music. Either criticism is like music and poetry or each school will be revisited out of

curiosity or will be abandoned as unwanted footnotes to the real thing, a commentary without a place, a kind of metonymic hubris that would displace literature if it could.

Frye—in 1971—saw himself in a much more historical light than those who have charged him with New Criticism (obviously against Wimsatt's wishes), proto-structuralism or structuralism:

I wanted a historical approach to literature, but an approach that would be or include a genuine history of literature, and not simply the assimilating of literature to some other kind of history. It was at this point that the immense importance of certain structural elements in the literary tradition, such as conventions, genres, and the recurring use of certain images or image-clusters, which I came to call archetypes, forced itself on me. (*Critical Path* 23)

Frye's notion of history includes a literary history that looks at the historical development of literature from within. This literary history is not potted history with a few literary titles and references thrown in to demonstrate a tenuous link between real history and ornamental literature but offers the history of genre: how, for instance, tragedy has changed over time and how it has stayed the same. If this is formalism, it is a historical formalism. It depends on context. I prefer to call it historical poetics, which relies on a history of poetics.

To say that Frye is an unhistorical critic or an anti-historical critic is an error. To say that one doesn't like Frye's history is a more honest view. It is improbable that any critic or theorist could write without an explicit or implicit view of history. Frye is no different. In fact, Frye has contributed a great deal to contemporary debates on historiography because of his theory of narrative and, more particularly, his assertion that story, and not argument, is the beginning of the order of words. Frye's greatest influence in historiography has been felt through the innovative work of Hayden White, whose *Metahistory* (1973) woke many historians and literary critics from their dogmatic slumber. White helped us to wake up once more to history, not simply as a string of positivist data or as an external wrapping to literature that was more observed in the breach, but as a philosophy of history. The debt White owes to Frye and the debt we owe to White recall the undesirability of a separation of poetic form and historical context. In addition to genre White emphasizes narrative in

history. Narrative becomes a driving force in new historicism (which Stephen Greenblatt calls cultural poetics) and cultural materialism, which might be called forms of postmodern history. It might be, as Frye and White argue, that the form of narrative is the content, so that such a separation is illusory and misguided.

White's *Metahistory* has complex goals, and I am concentrating only on the aims that relate to Frye. From White's definition of a historical work—"a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse"—it is not difficult to see the reason for his interest in Frye's theory of narrative (ix). White sets out "to construct a typology of historiographical styles" and to penetrate beneath the manifest dimensions of the historical work (epistemology, aesthetics, ethics) "to the deeper level on which these theoretical operations found their implicit, precritical sanctions" (ix-x). Frye himself has spoken about typology from *Fearful Symmetry* to *The Double Vision*. He also borrowed Gerard Manley Hopkins's notion of overthought and underthought to express his view that poetry has a metaphorical underpinning to its surface movement or "assertions." In *Words with Power* Frye quotes Bertrand Russell, who seems to think that philosophers do what Frye says poets and critics do, and what White considers to be the practice of historians:

Each philosopher, in addition to the formal system which he offers to the world, has another much simpler of which he may be quite unaware. If he is aware of it, he realizes it probably won't quite do. He therefore conceals it and sets forth something much more sophisticated which he believes, because it is like his crude system, but which he asks others to accept because he thinks he has made it such as it cannot be disproved. (*A History of Western Philosophy*, ch. 23, qtd. in Frye, *Words with Power* 150)

In an interview about a year before he died, Frye elaborated on the passage by interpreting Russell as saying that the myth is the body and the philosophical structure the clothes, or that philosophy is the body and myth the skeleton. Either way, Frye says, myth needs a philosophical superstructure (Cayley 94-95). It is also possible, as Russell and White are saying, that the superstructure also relies on the myth.

In setting up his typology White is explicit about the necessity of postulating "a deep level of consciousness on which a historical thinker

chooses conceptual strategies by which to explain or represent his data" (x). According to White, "the historian performs an essentially *poetic* act, in which he *prefigures* the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain 'what was *really* happening' in it" (x). The types or forms of prefiguration are, following Aristotle, Vico, and modern linguists and literary theorists (like Jakobson and Frye), four tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. White emphasizes the poetic aspects of historiography and the philosophy of history (x). He concludes "[t]hat the dominant tropological mode and its attendant linguistic protocol comprise the irreducibly 'metahistorical' basis of every historical work," which implies a philosophy of history (xi). Like Frye, White thinks that the theory of his discipline depends on a theory of language. In an echo of the "Polemical Introduction" to *Anatomy of Criticism*, White makes his central point: "in any field of study not yet reduced (or elevated) to the status of a genuine science, thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp the outline of objects inhabiting its field of perception" (xi). White, like Frye, derives the philosophy or theoretical framework of his subject inductively from it, in his case history and in Frye's literature (xi). Both Frye and White think that the modern ironic mode can turn into another mode by negating itself or by reverting or returning in a kind of Viconian cycle (xii).

Where does White differ from Frye? Both are interested in *mimesis*, but White concentrates on the historical work, "a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*" (*Metahistory* 2). For White, the most vexed problem in modern Western literary criticism is that of realistic literary representation (see Wellek and Warren 50, 212-25). In considering *mimesis* White follows the example of Auerbach, the Hegelian, and Gombrich, the Neo-Positivist, in the spirit of Karl Popper. The central problem for modern historiography is realistic historical representation, so that White has to translate from the literary context. Although Auerbach and Gombrich ask about the nature of realistic representation, neither analyses historical representation. They inquire about the historical elements of a realistic art; White investigates the artistic components of a realistic historiography. In this task White has found the philosophical systems of

Frye and Kenneth Burke useful. White thinks that "the whole discussion of the nature of 'realism' in literature flounders in the failure to assess critically what a genuinely 'historical' conception of 'reality' consists of" (3). Frye, Auerbach and Gombrich use a tactic in which they place the fictive between the mythical, which is equated with the conceptual, and the historical, which is thought to be empirical. (The philosophers Gallie, Danto and Mink discuss the fictive.) They view literature as being more or less realistic, which depends on the ratio between the conceptual and realistic elements. This analysis is perceptive but might be, as White seems to realize, stretching it for Frye, who championed romance and did not like the word "realism," which White also places in italics. In discussing the relations among myth, history and the philosophy of history, Frye, in White's view, saw the problem White sets out (see "New Directions from Old" in *Fables of Identity*). Although White says that he profited from reading the work of French structuralists, such as Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, he sees them as "captives of tropological strategies of interpretation in the same way that their nineteenth-century counterparts were" (3). White thinks that Foucault is not aware that he formalizes tropes into the categories he uses for analysing history (3, see White, *Content of the Form* 115). The only critic whom White credits with understanding this problem is Frye.

But White sets up an "ideal-typical structure" of a historical work just as Frye keeps an equivalent for a literary text that includes its sliding scale of shifts in genre (*Metahistory* 5). White wants to see the transformation of chronicle into story, Frye of myth into story. Both are interested in the relation of plot to argument and in the ideological implication of the relations of these aspects of narrative (White, *Metahistory* 5). From *The Critical Path* through *The Great Code* and *Words with Power* to *The Double Vision*, Frye concentrates his efforts on the relation of mythology to ideology and, consequently, the social and historical consequences of that relation. While realizing that the historian is also an inventor, White keeps before us the main distinction between the subjects that Frye and he study: historians find their stories, fiction writers invent theirs (6-7). It is not surprising when White asks what kind of a story has been told in histories that he resorts to Frye who has provided in *Anatomy* a schema of literary kinds or genres (7).

In identifying the different modes of emplotment—romance, tragedy, comedy and satire—or the ways by which sequences of events are fashioned into a story of a given kind, White says that he is following the line that Frye takes in *Anatomy* (7). Although a particular historical account often contains stories in one mode as phases of the whole set of stories emplotted in another mode, its author—the specific historian—must emplot "in one comprehensive or *archetypal* story form" the entire "set of stories making up his narrative" (7-8). White says that Frye's taxonomy works well for a restricted art form like historiography, in which the historian claims not to be telling the story for its own sake and emplots it in a conventional form (8). Even though White makes a wide use of Frye's schema, he pursues, in particular, Frye's analysis of irony.

The worlds of modern and postmodern literature and historiography often show the marks of irony, so that White is drawn to Frye's astute comments on irony. Among other points, Frye says: "Irony with little satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy" that centres on "a theme of puzzled defeat"—the central theme of ironic literature is the disappearance of the heroic (qtd. in White 231). White is interested in the extremes of irony where he wishes to set irony against itself in order to effect something positive. It is not the irony of the German romantics, Hegel, Marx, the modernists and the New Critics, that White seems to think is extreme because they are generally dialectic and two-eyed. Rather it is the irony of existentialism (perhaps beginning with a debt to Kierkegaard and almost certainly to Nietzsche) that troubles White:

In its most extreme form, however, when Irony arises in an atmosphere of social breakdown or cultural demise, it tends toward an Absurdist view of the world. Nothing is more Ironic than the early Existentialist philosophy of Sartre, in which the emphasis is everywhere placed on man's capacities for "bad faith," for betrayal of himself and others; in which the world is entertained as a spectacle of brutal self-servitude, and commitment to "others" is regarded as a form of death. (232)

This anti-heroism, White says, makes it the antithesis of Romanticism, the all too human aspects of the epic and heroic on the other side of tragedy (see *Anatomy* 237). There, where the implications of irony are pushed to their logical conclusions, "the fatalistic element in human life is raised to the status of a metaphysical belief" and expresses itself in the imagery of

closed wheels and cycles in a world Frye calls the irony of bondage, a nightmare of tyranny, a "demonic epiphany" (White 232; Frye 238-9). Irony destroys an ideal goal or any substitute, so, in Frye's words, "*sparagmos*, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme of irony and satire" (qtd. in White 232).

But White's analysis, which builds on Frye, has wider implications than for the ironic history of Jacob Burkhardt. White's discussion implies that the modernist linguistic doubt of Saussure and Pierce, which involves the arbitrariness of the verbal sign in relation to the world it represents, is different in degree but not in kind from the sceptical irony about the relation between signifier and signified in Derrida and the deconstructionists. Derrida's quarrel with Saussure, his difference from him, is that Saussure may have been trying to recoup essence and was not going far enough in his irony. Paradoxically, postmodern irony, if there is such a thing, arises in opposition to the moment when the Schlegels, Saussure, the New Critics, structuralists and others try to pull back from the abyss of nihilism, instability and infinitely constructed meaning to some sense of pattern and order. White's description, though more general, might serve to imply this move:

The linguistic mode of the Ironic consciousness reflects a doubt in the capacity of language itself to render adequately what perception gives and thought constructs about the nature of reality. It develops in the context of an awareness of a fatal asymmetry between the processes of reality and any verbal characterization of those processes. Thus, as Frye indicates, it tends toward a *kind* of symbolism, in the same way that Romanticism does. But unlike Romanticism, Irony does not seek the ultimate metaphor, the metaphor of metaphors, by which to signify the essence of life. For, since it is stripped of all illusions," it has lost all belief in "essences" themselves. (233)

The trouble is, if one pushes White's argument to its logical conclusion, it is impossible to speak of an illusion without illusion, or to speak of the end of essence without making an essential statement about that fact, even if one couches the ironic statement in tentativeness, qualifications and disclaiming traces. It is possible that taken to its conclusion postmodern and post-structuralist irony, even by any other



name, turns back on itself until two negatives become a positive. Postmodern irony might be as much its own end as the end of Romantic and modernist irony. Quite possibly, it turns back at another moment, but in fact Romantic irony disquieted Hegel precisely because it wouldn't discipline itself in a dialectic into something positive (see Hart, *Theatre and World* 9-11, 210, 222-31, 257-8). Only in later years did some of the Romantic ironists turn away from (perhaps even against) their earlier work. They might have selected another genre for their writing. The movement to irony is not an ineluctable and permanent change in history but a historical moment in a different context, possibly like the move from structuralism to post-structuralism. In the past few years we have witnessed, for better or worse, a similar process of retraction and conversion of narratives among many deconstructionists and postmodern theorists. If nothing else, many have undergone a retooling. As early as 1973, White could write (here the passage continues from the last one I have quoted):

Thus Irony tends in the end to turn upon word play, to become a language about language, so as to dissolve the bewitchment of consciousness caused by language itself. It is suspicious of *all* formulas, and it delights in exposing the paradoxes contained in every attempt to capture experience in language. It tends to dispose the fruits of consciousness in aphorisms, apothegms, gnomic utterances which turn back upon themselves and dissolve their own apparent truth and adequacy. In the end, it conceives the world as trapped within a prison made of language, the world as a "forest of symbols." It sees no way out of this forest, and so it contents itself with the explosion of all formulas, all myths, in the interest of pure "contemplation" and resignation to the world of "things as they are." (233)

Irony, as White notes, is useful in questioning superstitions, beliefs, dogmas and smug assumptions. Ironists, like Erasmus, Voltaire, Nietzsche and Derrida, have played a positive role in exposing the excesses of communities of belief and power. In one aspect of their writing Frye and White use this kind of irony, although both recognize the limits and abuses of irony. Frye wishes to expose ideology, as Barthes wants to expose mythology. And White wants to demystify demystification. It is possible that anything positive left unchecked will become negative.

Frye influences White considerably. White builds on the work of linguists in characterizing his four principal modes of poetic discourse: on the world hypothesis of Stephen C. Pepper to identify four different theories of truth in the historical thinkers White studies; on Frye's theory of fictions to find four different archetypal plot structures that historians can use to "figure historical processes in their narratives as stories of a particular kind"; and on Karl Manheim's theory of ideology to discern "four different strategies of ideological implication by which historians can suggest to their readers the import of their studies of the past for the comprehension of the present" (426-7). In the past dozen years White has continued to call for, and to observe, a return to narrative in an array of disciplines, including history and literary studies. Perhaps one of the most interesting and fruitful developments in that period has been cultural studies. In conjunction with the postmodernist school, this group of critics focusses on narrative. As White says:

. . . cultural critics, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, have commented on the death of the great "master narratives" that formerly provided precognitive bases of belief in the higher civilizations and sustained, even in the early phases of industrial society, utopistic impulses to social transformation. And indeed, a whole cultural movement in the arts, generally gathered under the name post-modernism, is informed by a programmatic, if ironic, commitment to the return to narrative as one of its enabling presuppositions. (*Content of Form* xi)

Such trends provide evidence, in White's view, that the recognition of narrative already possesses a content, before any specific actualization in speech or writing, which he calls the "content of the form" (xi). A Marxist critic who returns to narrative and does so with Frye's help is Fredric Jameson. Before turning to my own comments on the relation of Frye to Jameson, I want to mention briefly White's view of this influence.

Jameson, according to White, is a dialectical thinker who entertains seriously the ideas of those who do not share his Marxist perspective. He likes to expropriate the most valid insights of his strongest critics. White likens the introduction to *The Political Unconscious* to Frye's "Polemical Introduction" to *Anatomy* because of its "ambitious attempt to compose a Marxist version of Frye's great work," that is "a synthesis of critical

conventions" (White, *Content of Form* 144). Marx said he had stood Hegel on his feet and planted him in the ground of history; Jameson claims to be doing the same to Frye. Why Jameson salutes Frye, in White's view, is that Frye reminds us that Marxist hermeneutics needs to attend to symbolism and "the impulse to 'libidinal transformation'" (White 145; see Jameson 73). For White, Jameson's political unconscious is the equivalent of Frye's "vision" attained at "the anagogic moment of literary expression" (145). Jameson's social poetics or hermeneutics are a promise to "keep faith" with the medieval system that Frye draws upon (Jameson does not think that Frye has kept faith with it), "to restore," in Jameson's words, "a perspective in which the imagery of libidinal revolution and bodily transformation once again becomes a figure for the perfected community" (74; qtd. in White 145). Jameson thinks that he is reversing Frye and claims he is arguing for the unity of the body's prefiguration of "the renewed organic identity of associative or collective life" (74; qtd. in White 145). As with all Utopian schemes, Jameson's raises the question of how different the utopian impulse is from the nostalgic one. The organic society may be as retrograde as it is avant-garde. The revolution can always turn back on itself.

With this last point, I have turned from White's helpful comments on Jameson to my own views on his relation to Frye.<sup>2</sup> Jameson takes Frye very seriously and considers him a historical critic. His reading of Frye is exemplary because he takes seriously Frye's ideas, including those about symbolism, even though the two theorists do not share Marxist ideology (69-75; see Salusinszky 38-39). Where we diverge most from the text we are interpreting, there should we try hardest to understand it. The clash between Frye and some political critics, such as some Marxists and cultural materialists, is that while he considers mythology to be prior to ideology, they see mythology (and Frye's view of it) as a form of ideology (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 204; Frye, *Critical Path* 49-51). This disagreement between Frye and some of his political successors is not over the importance of narrative and history but over their purpose and epistemological status; about, especially, the relation of literature to the world and the role of story for the individual and society.

Jameson, a Marxist, sees the importance of Frye's work just as Frye understands the significance of the Marxist project. When Jameson recognizes that the need to "transcend individualistic categories and

modes of interpretation" is basic for a doctrine of the political unconscious—the interpretation in light of the associative or collective—he shifts from the Freudian hermeneutic to Frye's archetypal system. Like Freudianism, this system valorizes desire but also explicitly conceives of the function of culture in social terms. Jameson asserts that for any contemporary re-evaluation of interpretation, the "most vital exchange of energies" occurs between psychoanalysis and theology. Although Jameson wants to move beyond Frye's theological grounding, he admits its importance (Jameson 68-69). Frye values Marxism as a necessary critique of bourgeois society and an integral part of the Western imagination, but he is sceptical about it as a practical political system that enhances human freedom (Salusinszky 38-39). He thinks that the social democracies of the West are the first to develop a cultural dialectic in society between two mental attitudes, the active and the passive, characterized by the creative and the communicating arts respectively. The active response to contemporary society is an important function of the arts. Frye describes the activists:

On the one side are those who struggle for an active and conscious relation to their time, who study what is happening in the world, survey the conditions of life that seem most likely to occur, and try to acquire some sense of what can be done to build up from those conditions a way of life that is at least self-respecting. . . . The subject matter of contemporary literature being its own time, the passive and uncritical attitude is seen as its most dangerous enemy. Many aspects of contemporary literature—its ironic tone, its emphasis on anxiety and absurdity, its queasy apocalyptic forebodings—derive from this situation. (*Modern Century* 18-19)

These are not the words of a critic who thinks that literature is not produced in social, political and historical conditions, someone who would seal the writers or readers of literature from society.

Frye and Jameson may have different utopias but they are both utopian. According to Jameson, Frye is vitally interested in community (Jameson 68-70). In the second and third chapters (lectures) of *The Modern Century*, Frye defines a social role for art and education, an issue that recurs in the body of Frye's criticism and theory throughout his career. In Frye's schema the artist is a liberator who opposes political repression and illusions of universal progress, and education assimilates

the arts into society. Frye proposes that humans create open myths for democracy as opposed to the closed myths based on a religious past. Religion and poetry are, for Frye, open mythologies, although in the past many have considered religion in a closed and doctrinal way, so that these two subjects suggest that there are no limits to the human imagination. This discussion of the shift from divine to human myths also occurs later in *Creation and Recreation*. With a prophetic hope, which has much to do with the Canada of the 1990s, Frye suggests that we imagine a better or ideal society that casts across the blaze of lies, power and alienation that comprise our world, to dream "the uncreated identity of Canada" (116-23). Here is the Blakean Frye trying to build a New Jerusalem amid sectarian strife, ironic of his chances but dreaming, nonetheless.

And Frye wanted his historical criticism to be a history of and from literature and not a history of which it was an incidental or minor part. Literature and Criticism, which was a theory of literature, was not to be secondary to the other great subjects. Frye's history is inductive and not an importation of the historian's craft. This is one of the major ways in which Frye differs from many of his "literary" historicist successors, for while they often hide their formalist interest and styles, they appeal to history as some fundamental and unassailable discipline. White is helpful in this regard. We who live in an age of historical criticism should not turn away from formal criticism. History too has a shape.

Perhaps the most neglected aspect of Frye's theory among his critics is his social and historical thought. My interest here is in Frye the historicist, the Frye we find most in the "Tentative Conclusion" to the *Anatomy* rather than the synoptic Frye in the "Polemical Introduction."<sup>3</sup> In *The Great Code*, Frye defends a specific prophetic pronouncement in his great work from the 1950s:

In my *Anatomy of Criticism* I remarked that literary criticism was approaching the area of the social sciences. The statement was strongly resisted, as it cut across the conditioned reflexes of most humanists at the time, but language since then has been taken to be a model of investigation in so many fields, and the theory of language has revolutionized so many approaches in psychology, anthropology, and political theory, to say nothing of literary criticism itself, that no one can any longer regard the

humanistic concern with language as separable or even distinguishable from other concerns. (xviii)

Frye's focus on language is more akin to the structuralist (and even post-structuralist) view that language is a concern in all writing. Hayden White's observations about the centrality of language in the humanities corroborates in the 1970s and 1980s what Frye was asserting in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

Frye's concern for narrative and language and his insistence that literary genre be discussed historically should spur interest in his theory. It bears an interesting relation to new historicism and cultural materialism, which yoke narratives from the past with those of the present, and which prefer the synecdochic and sometimes metonymic narrative of the anecdote and the metaphorical narrative of analogy.<sup>5</sup> But having backed into or returned to Frye's *Anatomy* by way of his influence on others, especially White and Jameson—a prominent historiographer and cultural critic respectively—I want to examine history in Frye's most famous book, particularly as it is set out in the conclusion. In what follows I shall, however, also look forward to Frye's affinities with and disjunctions from his critical and theoretical successors.

In the "Tentative Conclusion" to *Anatomy*, Frye is suggestive and historical. His "Polemical Introduction" was so persuasive that it came to be associated with a firm and powerful system rather than a tentative openness. There need not be a conflict between Frye's textual archetypes and the texture of history because Frye uses a utopian historiography to make his view of temporality coherent (Fletcher 34-35). Frank Lentricchia discusses historicity in *Anatomy* and the ways it goes beyond New Criticism, but a related and more elaborated argument needs to be made today in relation to new developments in literary theory, partly because his discussion of Frye's use of history, and Angus Fletcher's, has not been properly heeded (Lentricchia, "Historicity"; *After the New Criticism* 3-26). The rest of my essay concentrates on the sense of *Anatomy's* ending and why it is not the hermetic seal to an airtight formalist schema. Frye's emphasis is not primarily historical in conventional historicist terms. Instead, he uses philosophy of history, an interest of historiography in the shapes and ends of history, in setting out his historical anatomy of literature and criticism. These concerns have not evaporated amongst Frye's successors in literary theory even if there is now a desire to

historicize literature through historical particulars rather than the universals of the philosophy of history. But then Frye was not averse to applying a vast range of discrete and different examples from a wide range of historical periods.

Philosophy of history, the shape of historical narrative and the difference between past writing and later readings recur in Frye's work. In the "Tentative Conclusion" Frye says that it would be foolish to exclude different kinds of critics, including historical critics, and asserts that he is attacking only the barriers between the various methods. In 1957, these methods are archetypal or mythical criticism, aesthetic form criticism, medieval four-level criticism, text and texture criticism and historical criticism (341). Although historical criticism is one of the options, a critic must have more than any one method in order to achieve a wide understanding of the complexity of literature. Despite his denials elsewhere, Frye's statement here shows affinities with the Chicago school of pluralism, which argued for different methods for different problems. Frye tends even more towards the syncretic or eclectic view of literary theory and criticism. Near the end of his life, Frye also recognizes the historical context of *Anatomy* and the ways in which criticism had since changed: "I would have to write a very different book today, because I would have to deal with the developments of criticism since 1957. That would mean that I would have to consider all kinds of things that didn't come into the *Anatomy* because they weren't around in 1957" (Cayley 86).

Two obvious but reductive responses to Frye exist. We can make him our contemporary or consign him to the scrap heap. In 1957 Frye sometimes sounds like our contemporary by way of a Marxist turn of phrase or an observation on the material nature of culture, but he also questions the critical practice of making contacts with other disciplines rather than with other literary critics. This practice can lead to literary essays that sound like bad semantics, bad metaphysics, bad comparative religion. Not surprisingly, Frye offers an alternative: he suggests an overarching role for archetypal criticism. It is debatable how central archetypal criticism is today. It has been assimilated into the scholarship of literary studies but is hardly on the surface of most recent debates in critical theory. I would suggest that universals, even the constructed and possible universals of fictional worlds and poetics, have been repressed

for a time just as minute particulars were and that the discipline needs a dialectic between both to function well. It would come as no surprise if archetypal criticism, probably in a displaced form, made its way back into the avant-garde of theoretical debate. Frye uses archetypal criticism as that which illuminates the shape of literature as a whole, as a complementary supplement to allegorical criticism or what is more commonly known as textual commentary. Theoretical overview and close reading are mutual supplements.

In Frye's criticism there is a movement between the whole and the part. He wants a breaking down of the boundaries within criticism, whereas many critics and theorists today wish to break down the boundaries between disciplines and to intensify contacts with other disciplines. But the difference between Frye and his successors is not as great as it first appears. Critics translate the work of theorists outside literary theory in terms of literary theory. They mediate the contact with other disciplines for other critics. History, anthropology, Marxism, philosophy, and psychoanalysis are all mediated through the avant-garde of critical theory before being absorbed into the critical and theoretical mainstream. Whether this process is bad or invigorating is a value judgment and whether Frye would consider this mediation a dialogue between critics is itself a supposition based on the distinction of inside and outside the discipline. This differentiation, especially given how difficult it is to define literature and critical theory, would have to be heuristic and practical even at the theoretical level. For instance, is Greenblatt's history more literary than his literary criticism is historical? In assailing formalism, recent historical literary theorists have challenged the existence of poetics. To extend poetics to all of culture may, paradoxically, swallow poetics in culture. If the world is a text then there is no text different from the world.

Language does now occupy the centre of many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Although with a different emphasis, Frye anticipates the work of Jacques Derrida and Hayden White on the pervasive role of rhetoric in all discourses. Frye suggests that the language of all disciplines, including literary criticism and history, is rhetorical and, more particularly, metaphorical. He partakes in, but recognizes the ironic limits of, organic metaphors to describe history—such as the "quasi-organic rhythm of cultural aging" as postulated by



modern philosophical historians, or the decadence of capitalism as described by Marxists (343). That art does not evolve or decay Frye takes as a commonplace of criticism (344). A myth of progress—a telos—is what Frye shares with Christianity, Marxism and nineteenth-century economic theory. Frye sees a social function for criticism, which, unlike literature, ameliorates. "What does improve in the arts is the comprehension of them, and the refining of the society which results from it" (344). The consumer, and not the producer, finds improvement through literature. Unlike Marxists, Frye concentrates on the educated imaginations of individuals, who, as a body, then improve the society. His humanism is not an arid formalism. Whereas cultural production may be quasi-organic and half-voluntary, cultural consumption is "a revolutionary act of consciousness" (344). This act is spiritually productive and not politically productive in a Marxist sense. Frye says that the humanistic tradition arose from the printing press—a view not too different from McLuhan's and Ong's (but see *Critical Path* 8, 26). This invention, according to Frye, codified past art more than it stimulated new culture. In Frygian poetics the rights of readers, and the democratic and creative revolution that reading brings them, constitute an important historical movement.

Frye's recognition of historical difference qualifies his view that there are transhistorical elements in literature which allow for communication across the generations. A dialectic between continuity and change occurs in Frye's aesthetics. He is not, then, a dreaded essentialist dredging up inner essences to be fixed in marmoreal certainty and eternity. The terrible bugbear—aesthetics—is to be understood historically in the schemes of Raymond Williams and Northrop Frye. This comparison is not made to ignore their differences, which are obvious as the one embraced Marxism and the other did not, but their similarities, which have been all but unexamined, yet are instructive. To enter into the history of aesthetics, Williams says, actively means that "we have to learn to understand the specific elements—conventions and notations—which are the material keys to intention and response, and, more generally, the specific elements which socially and historically determine and signify aesthetic and other situations" (*Marxism* 157; see Eagleton, *Ideology* 1-12, 366-417). Even though Frye does not pursue this type of historical perspective, he recognizes it through an understanding of a kind of

Brechtian alienation effect in history and an Aristotelian conception of art:

Nearly every work of art in the past had a social function which is often not primarily an aesthetic function at all. The whole conception of "works of art" as a classification for all pictures, statues, poems, and musical compositions is a relatively modern one. . . . Thus the question of whether a thing "is" a work of art or not is one which cannot be settled by appealing to something in the nature of the thing itself. It is a convention, social acceptance, and the work of criticism in its broadest sense that determines where it belongs. It may have been originally made for use rather than pleasure, and so fall outside the general Aristotelian conception of art, but if it now exists for our pleasure it is what we call art. (344-5)

Both Williams and Frye focus on intention and reception. Frye might not view the aesthetic object with the same hermeneutic suspicion as Williams does, but they both say that the constitution of literature changes for historical reasons. As Frye's critical schema makes room for the writer and reader, it is rhetorical. His theory shares with reception theory the liberation of the reader. In the reader's imagination we find the revolution of our times. The individual, as someone who is liberated in himself or herself and then in the collective, is central to Frye's view and means that he comes at community from the opposite direction from Williams even if they sometimes arrive at similar answers. Intention can be an ideological question.

Ideology is another interest which Frye shares with Marxists such as Williams and Terry Eagleton. Frye recognizes that ideology is pervasive, something that he comes to admit, particularly in *Words with Power*. But he continues to postulate the putative and hypothetical space of literature where nothing is asserted as an ideal, a way of defining ideology and the literary and of understanding the fallen or mixed world and text. He would not be surprised by Terry Eagleton's discussion of the ideology of the aesthetic and would probably agree with Eagleton's polemical stance against those who find any connection between aesthetic and political ideologies to be scandalous or bemusing and those who would dismiss aesthetics because it has a bourgeois provenance (Eagleton, *Ideology* 8). There are different kinds of alienation in history, and ideology can

provide traces of them. Aesthetics and individual responses to works of art can become a pretext for ostracism.

Alienation plays an important role in Frye's literary theory. By definition, literary texts involve history, which implies an estrangement. For him, we are alienated from the original intentions of the author, as well as from his or her society. Frye implies that historical criticism involves alienation because history involves difference between one time and another: "Even the most fantastical historical critic is bound to see Shakespeare and Homer as writers whom we admire for reasons that would have been largely unintelligible to them, to say nothing of their societies" (345). As much as Derrida, and even the New Critics who proclaimed the intentional fallacy, Frye understands the difficulty, if not impossibility, of discovering original intentions: "One of the tasks of criticism is that of the recovery of function, not of course the restoration of an original function, which is out of the question, but the recreation of function in a new context" (345). Intentions and functions are re-created in the mind of the critic, whose different social context makes it impossible to secure the original. The critic becomes the hero. The mental fight supersedes the actual fight. With our Promethean fire—with its echoes of classical myth, of the inner light of the Nonconformists and the Romantic revolution of the imagination—the critic must re-create the past, which "is all that is there" (345). Plato's allegory of the cave is too gloomy a metaphor: rather than shadows flickering on an objective world, the shadows are within us, "and the goal of historical criticism, as our metaphors about it often indicate, is a kind of self-resurrection, the vision of a valley of dry bones that takes on the flesh and blood of our own vision" (345). Whereas Plato upholds the objective, Frye celebrates the subjective. The culture of the past is our buried life that we must make new (346). Frye's Romanticism supplements Plato's classicism. All genuine historical critics must show "the contemporary relevance of past art," by "supporting a cause or a thesis in the present," so that Frye might consider Greenblatt to be an able historical critic (346). The ethical dimension of history, of how the present uses the past, is inescapable because the historian lives and is trained in the present and is not a blank slate before the past. Literary texts are historical and thus possess this ethical dimension.

One of the ethical situations Frye found himself in was as a professor during the student unrest of the late 1960s who was asked to comment on those contemporary events. Frye often used notions of mythology, education and history to make sense of the revolt. In his preface to a reprint of *Fearful Symmetry* Frye likens the "nihilistic psychosis" of radical and reactionary forces at the end of the 1960s to similar forces in the 1930s and World War II. In advocating an open, classless society, where the university is the cultural engine, Frye raised suspicions that he was defending the university as a tool of the establishment—in Althusser's terms, an Ideological State Apparatus (see Hart, *Northrop Frye* ch. 6). In this period and the following 20 years or more, Althusser and Foucault have been influential, especially in new historicism, where subversion and containment became key terms. Cultural materialists, more than new historicists, like to interpret earlier critical practice in terms of nineteenth and twentieth-century contexts. By implication, Frye's work could be examined in this framework. Frye is not the pillar of the establishment that some critics have made him, though it is possible for all of us to be contained, or at least diffused, by the forces of establishment (see Kogan for an extreme example). Although Frye recognizes class conflict, he thinks that Matthew Arnold's view that culture attempts to do away with class conflict is a more productive position than dwelling on that friction (346-7).

Cutting through history, Frye asserts, we find a cross-section that we may call a class structure. Culture is not a series of isolated texts but "may be employed by a social or intellectual class to increase its prestige; and in general, moral censors, selectors of great traditions, apologists of religious or political causes, aesthetes, radicals, codifiers of great books, and the like, are expressions of class tensions" (346). By studying the pronouncements of these groups, we soon realize that the only consistent moral criticism of this kind is that which is "harnessed to an all-round revolutionary philosophy of society," like Marx's and Nietzsche's, in which "culture is treated as a human productive power which in the past has been, like other productive powers, exploited by other ruling classes and is now revalued in terms of a better society" (346). This ideal society can only exist in the future and is only valued in regard to "its interim revolutionary effectiveness" (346). Like Plato, whose *Republic* is an early example of looking at culture in a revolutionary way, ethical critics can

make culture in a definite future image and purge from the tradition any writers that do not fit. If historical criticism goes uncorrected, it connects culture only to the past, and if ethical criticism goes unchecked, it relates culture only to an ideal future society that might be brought about through the proper education of our youth (346).

Criticism, which is ambivalent cultural work in history, cannot avoid class. Frye observes what has become an underlying commonplace in Foucault, Greenblatt and Dollimore: "The body of work done in society, or civilization, both maintains and undermines the class structure of that society" (347). Rather than approve of revolutionary action, in which one class has a dictatorship over the other classes, or celebrate dialectical materialism—even though Frye thinks that when people behave as if they are material bodies this philosophy seems true—Frye wants to avoid the extreme dialectic that operates in actual wars and in verbal or mimic wars, where the ghosts of social conflict dwell (347). Even if no society can be free, classless and urbane, we must, in Frye's view, exercise our utopian imaginations as a form of spiritual liberation (347). In a statement that would provoke the opposition of many of our contemporaries, he declares: "The imaginative element in works of art, again, lifts them clear of the bondage of history" (347). Those works form part of liberal education, no matter the original intention of the authors. Their readers become liberated through the experience of criticism. If there is no free space in society, there is in the imagination. The possible or fictional world resides especially with the reader. The difficulty here may be that Frye does not elaborate fully how the liberation of the mind translates into the liberation of the world. How can criticism be so powerful?

Mental liberation includes the dimension of vision. Vision is at the heart of Frye's work. He seems to partake in a secular apocalyptic and messianic vision that is like the utopian aspect of Marxism. His schema or system provides a social and historical context for the way in which criticism and literature function and change in their various genres. He does not think that beauty can be studied as formal relations in an isolated work of art, but asserts that the work must be viewed socially and against the ideal of a complete and classless civilization, which is also the standard for ethical criticism (348). This social ideal is the culture in which we try to educate and free ourselves. Idealism provides goals for material social and historical change. Ethical criticism involves

a transvaluation, "the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture," a state of intellectual freedom (348). Frye disdains as a kind of defeatism that arises from a social malaise the notion that we cannot be detached from our own lives. Rather, in Frye's view, *theoria*, or withdrawn vision, enables the means and end of action and makes it purposeful by enlightening its goals (348). Perspective makes social action possible as opposed to representing a turning away from social responsibility. If there is no theory, action becomes paralysed. Milton's *Areopagitica* and Mill's *On Liberty* are great examples of theory that enables action (348-9). Like them, Frye hopes to use his perspective to demonstrate a social dimension to critical thought. He extends this dimension to literature and criticism.

Part of the social function of criticism is, for Frye, to be independent from literature and to give it a context within society. Recently, critical theory and literature have come closer once again in a movement towards writing. In some ways, this is a new move because criticism has been allowed to be more overtly like poetry, aphorism and other kinds of "creative writing." In other ways, this kind of gnomic or poetic notion of criticism has been expressed in pre-Socratic aphorism, Platonic allegory and Horatian verse criticism. Even Aristotle is supposed to have written philosophical dialogues. Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, Nietzsche and McLuhan were successful in successive centuries in demonstrating the continued effectiveness of aphorism in critical discourse. The tradition of Mennipean satire, which Lucian, Erasmus, Swift and others practised so powerfully and which Frye analyzed so astutely, showed the lasting appeal of the satirical mixing of genres of writing, fact and fiction, in the same discourse. Derrida and the decon-structionists, and some feminists and ficto-theorists, have contributed a great deal to the most recent breaking down of the binary opposition between creative and critical writing, the cultural tradition of giving precedence to the writer over the critic. Before them, Frye attempted to dignify criticism by making it different from, but equal to, creative writing. He tries to dispel the parasite fallacy of criticism in which the critic is a leech who feeds off literature and ruins it in his or her very analysis (349). Nonetheless, Frye does not practise Mennipean satire while he discusses it. He is an essayist. Frye claims that his archetypal criticism does not argue for the

aesthetic or contemplative aspect of art as the final resting place but, instead, facilitates, through a movement from a consideration of the individual work to the "total form of the art," an ethical criticism that participates in the work of civilization (349). He says that the patterns of words—like scripture, liturgy, a written constitution and a set of ideological directives—can remain fixed for centuries but that the interpretation of them will change historically, so that criticism occupies a central role in society (349). Interpretation, which resides at the centre of society, is historical.

A philosophy of history, which is an interpretation of the historical process, is necessary for an understanding of the subject but threatens to overwhelm the sequential with a consequential pattern. The same justification and problem applies to Frye's history of genre or literary history. The danger in Frye's method, as he recognizes, is "substituting Poetry for a mass of poems," but he attempts to avoid an "aesthetic view on a gigantic scale" by assuming "that all structures in words are partly rhetorical, and hence literary, and that the notion of a scientific or philosophical verbal structure free of rhetorical elements is an illusion" (350). Frye recognizes, as Derrida and others later do, that if all structures of words are, to some extent, rhetorical, the literary universe has become a verbal universe, and no aesthetic principle will contain the literary (350). The rhetoricians, much maligned in Plato, have been saying as much since before Socrates arrived on the scene.

Frye gives the debate a new twist in a new historical context. Most particularly, he takes into account the dominant model of science and its emergent imitator—social science—and wonders how they might relate to the critical analysis of literature. In 1957 he was suggesting the relation of literature to old and new disciplines, from mathematics to cybernetics. He compares in some detail literature and mathematics: "Both literature and mathematics proceed from postulates, not facts; both can be applied to external reality and yet exist also in a 'pure' or self-contained form" (351). By using an analogy to another discipline, Frye attempts to find a principle that is not strictly aesthetic to define literature as being and not being self-contained. Equations and metaphors are tautologies that postulate being and non-being simultaneously (352). Verbal structures are, according to Frye, representative and constructive, which are the two main views of language since Plato (352-3; see Waswo 1-47, 284-305).

From descriptive representational language we construct metaphors that become "units of the myth or the constructive principle of the argument" (353). Nevertheless, Frye differs from some of his more rhetorically committed successors because he warns that it would be silly to reduce rhetorically other disciplines only to myths and metaphors for polemical reasons because our proofs would be just as mythical and metaphorical. Criticism of truth, for Frye, has to do with content, but myth has to do with form, which is the kind of assertion that makes some critics think of Frye as a proto-structuralist (353). But in Frye's schema the myth is the source of coherence for an argument and so cannot be separated from content. Here, Frye admits to a Platonic affinity because Plato thought that the ultimate apprehension was either mathematical or mythical. Language—mathematics and literature—represents no truth but provides the means of expressing many truths (354). One difficulty in treating literature as just another historical document—as if it were a realistic description of the society in which it was written—is that literary representation is putative. It is also true, however, that aspects of historical, legal, mathematical and philosophical documents also involve fiction and possibility.

Frye's system is his critical plot or myth (mythos). He does not tell too many of his own stories in his criticism, but reports other myths to explain what he thinks literature is and to substantiate his great critical plot. He closes his "Tentative Conclusion" to his *magnum opus* with two myths—the Tower of Babel and the last chapter of *Finnegans Wake*. We cannot unite heaven and earth, Frye says, because when we try to think such thoughts we discover their inadequacy and the plurality of languages. If Joyce's dreamer cannot remember his communion with a vast body of metaphorical identifications, the ideal reader, or critic, can. Frye envisages the work of the critic as repairing the ruins of a fallen nature until we are happier far. Critics will use imagination to reforge "the broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept," so that if critics continue their criticism this re forging will be "the social and practical result of their labors" (354). Here we witness Frye's emphasis on society, practice and work, hardly the terms that make up typical contemporary characterizations of Frye. These last words of the body of the *Anatomy* are not those of a Wildean aesthete but echo Milton and Blake to break the mind-forged manacles and build with myths a



prophecy that is and is not historical. A social function of literature is to liberate readers through imagination so they can transform society. The question remains whether myth is enough to live by.

The utopian ends of literature are social: they are far from being useless. Is Frye's myth just another term for good ideology? If the utopian goals he speaks of arise out of the structure of things, then there is some grounding for his belief in the progress of criticism and the social good it brings through its act of mediation between literature and the community. If these goals are entirely constructed, what keeps the next generation from undoing what the last has done in pursuit of their own utopias? Frye himself discusses how easy it is for one person's utopia to be another's dystopia. How do we get beyond this satirical insight? Here is Frye's response. Part of the historical as well as literary endeavor involves visions of utopia (see Fletcher). The utopian impulse in literature and literary criticism has persisted and will persist. Writers in each historical moment, even if its texts speak to people through the translation of time, speak prophecies nonetheless by trying to perform the improbable but important task of projecting the present beyond the present in the present. Frye's utopian or positive hermeneutic is obviously not Jameson's, which appeals to the material over the ideal, but both dream a systematic dream of a better future by interpreting the dream of literature, both with a firm idea of the imperfect, and sometimes barbarous and dystopic, form of their societies. Both Frye and Jameson contemplate the collective nature of art (Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 291-2; see also Jameson, "Postmodernism" and *Postmodernism*). Frye's view of history and society as it was, is and will be provides us with a great reading of culture whether we agree with all of it or not. Contemporary critical theory and literature cannot afford to give up on the difficult dream of something better. It is no wonder that Frye's favorite Shakespearean play was *The Tempest*, where dystopic and utopian elements contend and interpenetrate, and that Jameson and others have found so much positive in Frye (Felperin, "Political Criticism"). Frye's utopian vision will continue to arouse ambivalent responses. Still, he will be translated over time: his great work never was designed to escape the political and social only to translate them through literature. In literature he found something positive between the nightmare of history and the no place of the future: one possible positive mediation was the dreaming body of the literary

critic. This dreaming mediator does cultural work in a present that is already past as it backs into the future.

And part of that dream for Frye, as it is in history for Hayden White, is the sliding and fluid scale of form that transforms the content. A story is not an argument, but there is a story beneath the argument, as Bertrand Russell suggests. Perhaps we are always facing a story-argument in philosophy, literary theory and history (Hart, "Stephen Greenblatt" 448). In theory, for Frye, the distinction among dialectic, poetics and rhetoric cannot be made except by an appeal to practice. He wished that literature was anything but assertion and argument verifiable in the world, but perhaps the boundaries between history and literature are too porous for Frye's distinction and the content of the form applies as much to history as to literature. But from another perspective, that shared form would prove Frye's point. His literary forms would be historical, as White's historical forms would be literary. Both would be poetic, as well as share rhetoric. The challenge then would be to make this history social rather than a prison house of forms. Frye, White, Jameson, Eagleton and others agree on this point but differ on how to go about achieving social criticism, or what might broadly be called theory with historical interests and impact. There is an identity in the identification of the problem but not in the moves toward a "solution." The material of history is as much words as planks and nails, all of which bend and split even as they hold together.

#### NOTES

1. Frye's place in our contemporary social, intellectual and historical context is too large a question to raise here, except suggestively (I address it more fully in *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination*). He has made his views known about the nature of his theory and its context, discussing, for instance, his relation to other theorists like Bloom and Derrida, the difference between his myth of concern and ideology and his relation to Marxism (Salusinszky 30-42; see Hart, "Book of Judges"; Krieger esp. 14-24; Dolzani esp. 65-66). Geoffrey Hartman may be considered as someone whose theoretical work demonstrates a movement towards deconstruction and away from Frye's position. For instance, in 1966 Hartman could praise Frye's universalism, democratization of criticism and recovery of romance for the imagination, whereas in the 1980s Hartman was more ambivalent towards Frye

but less so than those who chart the rise and fall of critical schools might imagine. Unlike W. K. Wimsatt, whose New Criticism Frye's *Anatomy* was displacing and who is said to have stormed out of the English Institute meeting in 1966, Hartman, whose deconstructive "school" later displaced the *Anatomy*, shows sympathy for Frye's position and admiration for the brilliance of its expression (Ayre 306). Hartman opposes Frye where Frye resists absorption to deconstruction: encyclopedic systemization, devaluation of language, reading that resists systems, and anti-relativism in method ("Ghostlier Demarcations," "Toward Literary History," "Sacred Jungle," "Culture of Criticism"; Salusinszky 74-96). If in 1957 Frye was walking the middle way between the historical critics, (the philologists and so-called old historicists), and the textual interpreters, (the New Critics), in the late 1960s to the early 1980s deconstructionists and post-structuralists became the most influential theorists, and from about 1980 onwards the new historicists and cultural materialists began to displace the deconstructionists (see Alteri; Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction*). In reviewing *The Stubborn Structure*, Raymond Williams, who influenced a generation of cultural critics, most notably Terry Eagleton and Jonathan Dollimore (who called Williams the inspiration for cultural materialism), admires Frye's work but faults it for neglecting contemporary experience and fostering abstraction, for succumbing to Matthew Arnold's belief in salvation through poetry (Williams, "Power to Fight"; Dollimore, Introduction 2-3). When Stephen Greenblatt, the leading new historicist, reviewed *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, he contrasted unfavorably this transcendental and prophetic work with the "startling architectonic power" of Frye's *Anatomy* and of two earlier works of Shakespearean criticism, *The Fools of Time* and *A Natural Perspective* (44). For Greenblatt, in Frye's last book on Shakespeare, a collection of undergraduate lectures, Frye places history below poetics, neglects the critique of the binary opposition of history and poetry, and is thereby indifferent to new historicism, which has called attention to the ways in which particular cultures "constitute systems of meaning and hence to shifting interests encoded in any given conception of the past," and, more generally, to "the theoretical turmoil of the past few years" (Greenblatt, *New Republic* [10 Nov. 1986]: 45; for more on new historicism and Greenblatt, see Hart, "New Historicism," "Stephen Greenblatt," and "Theatre and World"). Other methods or positions, some textual and some contextual, have exhibited great strength since the 1960s. Hayden White's metahistorical methodology, which especially flourished from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, is indebted in part to Frye's theory, particularly in the use of *mythos* or the emplotment of narratives (see White, *Metahistory* and "New Historicism" for his critique of new historicism). Feminism, postcolonial discourse theory, cultural studies and other contextual positions have been influential and have moved away from some of Frye's concerns. Postcolonialism and feminism are rapidly becoming the most active areas of literary studies (see, for instance, ARIEL 20.4 [1989]; Belsey; Newton). Postcolonialism has been gathering increasing notice since the mid-1980s and feminism has never lost its momentum but has become increasingly multifold, dynamic and suggestive for many areas of literary theory. Postcolonial writers and critics often focus on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, one of Frye's favorite

texts, and emphasize the political problematics rather than the redemptive mythic patterns (Nixon). These two positions are suspicious of the master narratives Frye examines and might resist the grand argument he produces (Lyotard addresses grand narratives; see Chambers [esp. xi-xx] for a fine discussion of oppositionality, which includes a consideration of Lyotard). With Greenblatt and the new historicists, whose debt to Foucault produces a similar hermeneutics of suspicion, these feminist and postcolonial oppositional critics resist logocentrism. These are complex and variegated movements (feminisms is an understatement), so that I do not want to "characterize" them and wish to note only that some of these critics have not found Frye to be their kind of revolutionary. For them, Frye's words with power appear to represent a phallogocentric and logocentric power, stemming from the Bible. Frye's revolution is not theirs.

In some ways new historicism, which uses techniques from New Criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism and feminism, is aligning itself with post-colonialism (see Hart, "New Historicism" and "Stephen Greenblatt"). The object of study is the new world narratives, particularly Columbus's diaries and the writings of early English settlers in North America (see Greenblatt, "Learning to Curse," and Nixon; one of my works in progress is called *New Worlds*). These "non-literary" texts were not Frye's focus. By moving the Renaissance to the Americas, these oppositional or cultural critics (and I include some of my moves [perspectives] in this movement) are trying to de-centre the European Renaissance. One of the dangers is that the Columbus whom the American academy subverts and problematizes may serve in this subversion to reinforce the power of an imperial state as opposed to the ongoing critique (not merely for 1992) that post-colonial writers, say, in the Caribbean, have been representing in their songs, poems, novels and other works. This coalition might also contain a world of difference. How does one reconcile the traces of the European past, even in their translation to the Americas, that are found in and that founded universities in this hemisphere with the oppositionality to the institution by those who have benefited from those institutions? Our very positions exist because of that European past. How am I not implicated in the very systems I seek to criticize? The same problems do not occur for dispossessed aboriginal peoples so often outside the universities, although other problematics—more urgent and pressing, like survival, alienation and taking destiny into their own hands—preoccupy them. Aboriginal and settler cultures are almost inextricably intertwined. Possibly, critics like Frye did not think it wise to speak for others outside their tradition: perhaps these critics considered such a representation of others presumptuous.

Whereas oppositional critics are discussing counter-narratives of the dominant gender, ideologies, and empires, Frye considered literature a counter-narrative of identity against the everyday world of alienation. I am not interested in being for or against Frye but only wish to complicate our notions of his work. In the polemical and dialectic world of criticism and theory it is easy to parody those who do not share our "positions." The trouble with, and beauty of, grammar and style is that they close down at least as many semantic options as they open up. Frye wrote enough

on Canada to understand this project. He discussed his fairly obscure home in the Americas long before many others got round to discussing less obscure places in the hemisphere. He understood the movement to the post-national. He said that all European settlers could do was to bring their sensibility to the new land. But the generation of 1968, many of whom are leaders among the oppositional critics, was one that Frye could not always fathom. The post-structuralist and postmodernist view that history makes no sense except what we make of it is only one option. As opposed to the "deconstruction" of narrativity that the post-structuralists bring about, Frye wants to argue for sense re-created in the imagination through the places literary texts give the reader. He understands the problems of communication but believes in communication (*Critical Path* 22). Construction and re-creation of meaning, rather than deconstruction, provide Frye's focus. New historicist, feminist and postcolonial criticism is making use of more fragmentary counter-narratives, so that narrative remains important to literary studies. Each of these "schools" may have its own implicit grand design or narrative, but each contains within it conflicting positions. As Hayden White says, and I have long maintained, "the conviction that one can make sense of history stands on the same level of epistemic plausibility as the conviction that it makes no sense whatsoever" (*Content of Form* 73, see 37-38). But I also agree with White that the choice of either option has implications for politics. Some writers do not want to conflate history and literature. For Frye, like Stephen Dedalus, the myth-building of literature might make sense of the nightmare of history (experience). Some of the teachers and students (now teachers) of the generation of 1968 also still resist the idea of the university that Frye so often defended (Salusinszky 37-38; Frye, "Definition of a University" and *On Education*; Greenblatt 44). In the mid 1960s Derrida came to America and in 1967 Frye wrote *The Modern Century*. The postmodern world was being born while the modern world was being proclaimed (see Lyotard; Jameson, "Postmodernism"; Hutcheon; Belsey). But history is not necessarily about progress. Frye thought that literature was an active force in negotiating the world. I think that Frye might admire this postmodern imagining and creation of a new world, a liberation for those enslaved by indifference and tyranny, even if he might not agree with the means of the revolution.

2. For a more detailed discussion of Frye and Jameson, particularly in regard to ideology, see the chapter on ideological contexts in my forthcoming book, *Northrop Frye*.
3. I am interpreting the ending of the *Anatomy* in light of its view of history, but I wish to note briefly its historical context, particularly the writings for which it acted as prolegomena rather than the earlier writings, like *Fearful Symmetry*, of which it was an epilogue, or at least a later movement in the music of Frye's ideas. I do not want to play down Frye's view that literature is autonomous. Rather, I wish to stress that Frye argues that literature is autonomous and has its own kind of history in relation to other histories. For Frye, his "formalism" is only apparent because each work is read in the context of the other works in that genre, or using that convention, or representing the same imagery. All literature becomes the historical context for a

single literary work. This is the major way in which Frye differs from the New Critics, although he shares with them the idea that the basis of poetic meaning is poetic language and form. In *The Critical Path* Frye says that the New Critics soon realized that their criticism lacked context so that many fell back on history (20-21). When he had the opportunity of addressing a large popular audience on the CBC late in 1962, he stated his position clearly: "Our principle is, then, that literature can only derive its forms from itself: they can't exist outside literature, any more than musical forms like the sonata and the fugue can exist outside music" (*Educated Imagination* 15). But paradoxically Frye admits that the motive for metaphor, the very use of literary language, is to associate the mind with the world, whereas the motive for writing outside literature is to describe the world (10). He sees identity, rather than separation, as the aim of writing literature. Even if literature has a refractory relation to the world by attempting to erase the difference between word and world, it stems from moments of identity in experience (4). These fables of identity, which Frye elaborates in *Anatomy* and a collection of essays on poetic mythology, rely on the unifying structure of imagery that is larger than a verbal structure. Literary forms and conventions, Frye argues, are received and enable imaginative expression of human experience (*Fables of Identity*). In *The Well-Tempered Critic* he places style more in a literary than a social context. But, like all great critics, Frye is hard to pin down. His protean nature is apparent in his interest in Canadian literature and culture. Like the annual reviews of Canadian literature in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, which were collected as part of *The Bush Garden*, and the later collection of essays on Canadian culture, *Divisions on a Ground*, *The Modern Century* is unabashed in its Canadian terms of reference, including the titles of the three chapters (and the original three comprised the Whidden Lectures at McMaster University in 1967) that are taken from the Canadian poets, Archibald Lampman, Irving Layton, and Emile Nelligan. Frye actually puts into context the relative obscurity of Canadian Confederation in 1867, which was being celebrated during the year in which he delivered the lectures. The purchase of Alaska, the passing of the Second Reform Bill and, above all, the publication of the first volume of *Das Kapital* overshadowed the independence of Canada in its domestic affairs (*Modern Century* 14). Frye argues that Canada has in its first hundred years as a nation moved from pre-national to post-national consciousness. He sets out "to consider what kinds of social context are appropriate for a world in which the nation is rapidly ceasing to be the real defining unit of society" (17-18). For those who would blindly take Frye's usual emphasis on the forms and autonomy of literature to be his only interest, the social criticism and prophetic musings of Frye seem forgotten.

Frye's social criticism is a major part of his corpus. The conclusions to the *Literary History of Canada*—which is reprinted as part of *The Bush Garden*—*The Critical Path* and *Spiritus Mundi* also examine the contexts, and especially the social conditions, of literary criticism. In *The Critical Path* Frye discusses disparate topics, such as Renaissance humanism, Marxism, the youth culture of the 1960s and McLuhanism. Frye's central ideas in this study are two opposing social myths: the myth of concern and the myth of freedom. The first myth emphasizes the conserva-

tive and communal, authority, belief and coherence. The second stresses the liberal and individual, tolerance, objectivity and correspondence. Frye says that the two myths combine to produce the social context of literature (*Critical Path*). Eagleton, in a moment of inattention or in a strange trace of imperial indifference, dismisses Frye's two myths, which begin with Homer and end with the kingdom of God, as a position between a conservative Democrat and a liberal Republican (94; see Wimsatt's implied elision of Frye into "American criticism," 85; Frye, Wimsatt and Eagleton are all gifted polemicists). Although Eagleton is always challenging because of his satirical élan, he translates these American parties north and neglects Frye's suspicion of party politics and his preference, if any, for Canada's socialist party, the New Democrats, which would not be tolerated, let alone popular, in the United States. One of Frye's related concerns, which he discusses in *The Critical Path* and *Spiritus Mundi*, is social contract theory.

4. The New Critics wanted a heightened and distinctive literary language that one could find most readily by a close reading of a lyric. But Frye is ambivalent about contemporary theory, avoiding specific discussions of it in *The Great Code*, except to say that some of the developments in that theory are temporary because they are irrational or paradoxical dead-ends (xviii). He tempers this kind of dismissal with an acknowledgement of Derrida. Soon after using the topos of inexpressibility, (in this case a great theorist being a teacher who does not want to overcomplicate his argument and so leaves off the discussion for a vague future time and place), Frye includes Derrida in a statement of the book's general argument: "The general thesis is that the Bible comes to us as a written book, an absence invoking a historical presence 'behind' it, as Derrida would say, the re-creation of that reality in the reader's mind" (xxii). As usual, Frye is perceptive because he recognizes that history lies behind the textuality of deconstruction. In a move akin to reader response theory he sees the central importance of readers, who recreate reality in their minds, although reception theory exhibits many positions (Fish; see Iser). Frye echoes Derrida as a means of asserting the context behind text, the absence made present in the reader's mind, but he may differ from Derrida over the stability or even possibility of meaning. Is history just another text?

In *Words with Power*, Frye discusses critical theory and history at greater length. He characterizes this, his last long book, as a successor to the *Anatomy* and *The Great Code*, as a summing up (xii). The basic position of the *Anatomy*, Frye says, centres on the identity of mythology and literature and how the structure of myth, as well as legend, folktale and related genres, informs the structures of literature (xii). He says that one of the misunderstandings about comparative mythology is its most important extension into "literature (along with criticism of literature) which incarnates a mythology in a historical context" (xiii). Conversely, Frye argues, a literary criticism that cuts off, in mythology, its own historical and cultural roots becomes sterile. In a significant but oblique critique of some contemporary theoretical positions, Frye asserts that some forms of literary criticism "stop with an analytical disintegrating of texts as an end in itself; others study literature as a historical or ideological phenomenon, and its works as documents illustrating

something outside literature" (xiii). This view is like that of the "Polemical Introduction" to the *Anatomy*, but the textual "disintegration" of the deconstructionists has replaced the textual integration of the New Critics and, perhaps, the new historicists and cultural materialists have joined the Marxists in primarily ideological and historical criticism. As Frye himself acknowledges, his view has not substantially changed since *Fearful Symmetry* but has been an extension and refinement of his theory (xi; see *Critical Path* 9). The structural principles of literature—the derivation of literature from myth—are "conditioned by social and historical factors and do not transcend them, but they retain a continuity of form that points to an identity of the literary organism distinct from all its adaptations to its social environment" (xiii). These principles allow literature to communicate despite ideological changes throughout the centuries. Here, Frye opposes the challenge to structure and meaning that the deconstructionists and many postmodern theorists and critics have taken up. From the *Anatomy* to the two volumes on the Bible and Western literature, Frye is led to the oppositions between and shared ground of religion and literature (xiv). True to his theory, Frye is interested in similarities rather than in differences. He says that the best critics from various "schools" differ on the surface about the nature of literature but share "an underlying consensus of attitude" that should lead to "some unified comprehension of the subject," a construction as opposed to a deconstruction (xviii). Frye argues for a coherent criticism, not a wandering between "aimless paradoxes" that make texts all or nothing. For Frye, an address to students and a general public is the only way to break the bickering between theoretical schools (xix). Frye wants the humanities to educate a public that needs education and not be an exercise for a coterie. He explains the arc of his career that begins in earnest with *Fearful Symmetry*, takes off with *Anatomy* and culminates with *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*:

The view of critical theory as a comprehensive *theoria* may help to explain the role of the Bible in my criticism. The theory of genres in *Anatomy of Criticism* led me up to the sacred book, along with secular analogies or parodies of it, as the most comprehensive form that could reasonably be examined within a literary orbit. It then occurred to me that the perspective might be reversed, starting with the sacred book and working outwards to secular literature. (xx)

Frye gives the double perspective of the main part of his career. In *The Great Code* he implies that he has been rewriting the same work throughout his career when he says that all his critical work revolves around the Bible (xi, xiv). The task Frye set for himself is such an immense labor that it might take for its title, *The Bottomless Dream*, his personal choice of title for *A Natural Perspective*. Perhaps this double perspective comes clear in an anagnorisis just as in *Twelfth Night* Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, recognizes that the male twin and female twin (disguised as a male) are two different people—"A natural perspective, that is and is not!" (5.1.217; see *Natural Perspective* ix). To begin with the Bible is to be historical. Frye implies that literary critics usually exclude the Bible from discussions of literature. He sees the



connection between the scriptures and the secular scriptures as poetic language and the principle of the "great code" that the structures of these two "scriptures" reflect each other (xxii). Metaphor is the ground for social and individual experience (xxiii). Paradoxically, an important function of Frye's great schemata is to serve as a formalized historical context for close readings (xxii). It may be helpful to take up Frye's challenge and try to explore the underlying connections between his work and those works of other theorists. To do so, I am concentrating on the final movement of his central composition, the *Anatomy of Criticism*.

5. Frye cannot be reconstructed as a new historicist or cultural materialist—he was in his last decade when these two kinds of critics began to gather institutional strength—but some of his views are surprisingly like the ones these critics hold. As a polemicist, he probably understood their use of polemics. He would recognize their appeal to history, for he himself had appealed to it, but he might wonder at their return to literature despite their insistence on contextualizing it with "non-literary" texts. In 1971 Frye could impugn political and personal criticism as pre-critical anxiety and not genuine criticism (32-33). It is here that Frye parts company with the personal experience of seriatim explication and the political determinism of thematizing one social aspect of the content as if it were the work itself. Frye thereby differentiates himself from many of his predecessors (Marxists, critics of taste, some New Critics) and many of his successors (new historicists, ficto-theorists). In a world that has always been short of time it is easy to stereotype rather than to understand. Readers of Frye can now read him polemically without reprisal. The dead only talk back through text and memory. Although Frye himself was a polemicist, he thought that we could imagine a free space of understanding even if it would never exist in the world.

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