

MYTHOLOGY, VALUE-JUDGEMENTS AND IDEOLOGY IN NORTHROP FRYE'S "ANATOMY" AND BEYOND

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HAMLET PLAYS WITH DIFFERENCE IN COMPARING A HAWK and a handsaw as if they should be mentioned in the same breath and thought of in the same comparison in a way that would make John Donne wonder whether his metaphysical conceits, such as the lovers as a compass, had not gone far enough. Some comparisons stretch the point because of their disparateness. Others are based on more similarities. Making distinctions can be difficult, as in the case of mythology and ideology. But there is a middle ground. Let us take the comparison between music and poetry. The American composer, Aaron Copeland, was pleased to be appointed the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard in 1951, but wondered in his lectures why he was asked. As a young man, he had commiserated with poets because they "were trying to make music with nothing but words at their command," yet in time he saw that behind the music of both arts they were joined in "an area where the meanings behind the notes and the meaning beyond the words spring from some common source" (Copeland 1). Copeland was poetic about music just as Northrop Frye considered the music of poetry and even of theory. The composer said: "The music of poetry must forever escape me, no doubt, but the poetry of music is always with me" (2). Whereas the song of literature preoccupied Frye, that of music was the concern of Copeland: "It signifies that largest part of our emotive life –the part that sings. Purposeful singing is what concerns most composers most of their lives" (2). In the spirit of the times, Copeland also added:

The musical work must be reinterpreted, or better still, re-created in the mind of the performer or group of performers. Finally the message, so to speak, reaches the ear of the listener, who must then relive in his own mind the completed revelation of the composer's thought. (2)

This recreation and reliving is also something that R. G. Collingwood discussed in 1946 when looking at history as a re-enactment of past experience.

Collingwood said that the past is never empirical but is mediate, inferential or indirect and that the historian, when trying to discover the past, looks at relics that contain words and has to discover what the person who wrote them meant: "To discover what this thought was, the historian must think it again for himself" (Collingwood 233, see 282). The historian is re-enacting in his own mind the experience of the writer. Frye also gravitated to moments of recognition or discovery and to recreation of literature in the mind. Collingwood, Copeland and Frye also posed the question of identity in difference, of the relation between interpretation and reinterpretation. This interest in recreation and re-enactment in the interpreter might be called the drama of meaning.

The question of interpretation and recognition relates to central concerns in the work of Frye that touch on language, story and argument. In a number of my earlier works on Northrop Frye, I discussed the various relations among myth, metaphor and ideology, but I will try to shape and reshape my discussion in a new context (see Hart 1992, 1994).¹ "Myth," "*mythos*" ("*muthos*") and *mythoi* are terms that Northrop Frye used in the first decades of his career. One of the cruxes over the term "myth" is how it shifted from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, from myth as fable, fiction and invention to myth as understood in archaic societies, or, as Mircea Eliade once said, myth as "true story" or one "that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant" (Eliade 1). Frye explored this interface in myth. His influence was wide-spread, and one such well-known effect on a student was Margaret Atwood's transformation of Frye's concern with myth and Canadian literature and culture into her own interests, especially in *Survival* (see Howells 13).

1. Criticism and ideology in the "Anatomy"

Here, as one of Frye's many former students, I shall concentrate most on Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), as part of an appreciation after fifty years. For all Frye's later interest in the term "ideology," he does not really address the issue under this rubric in *Anatomy*. Mythology, whether in terms of myth, *mythos* or mythical modes, was much more of a concern in this Frye's most renowned book.² Frye saw in literature the home of displaced myth and argued for the identity between mythology and literature, which represented the might have been of story against the actuality of what happened that is the basis of history. Nevertheless, in the "Polemical Introduction" to *Anatomy*, Frye does envision criticism as being founded on an inductive

study of literature out of which critical principles arise. Thus, the critic would avoid determinism in which Marxism, Thomism, liberal humanism, neo-Classicism, Freudianism, Jungianism, or existentialism substitute “a critical attitude for criticism, all proposing, not to find a conceptual framework for criticism within literature, but to attach criticism to one of a miscellany of frameworks outside it” (Frye 1957: 6). In a view that probably swam against the current of what proceeded and followed Frye, he set out what I have called elsewhere a declaration of independence for literature and criticism (critical theory). Another sentence encapsulated this point of view: “Critical principles cannot be taken over ready-made from theology, philosophy, politics, science, or any combination of these” (7). Frye argued against a study of literature anchored in the world beyond it. He warned against certain dangers: “To subordinate criticism to an externally derived critical attitude is to exaggerate the values in literature that can be related to an external source, whatever it is” (7). Ideological criticism, or a historical approach that comes from history rather than from the history of literature, would not be of the type for which Frye was advocating. Disinterestedness, which Frye admitted was difficult, is the best tact for the critic. Frye favoured an inductive study of literature rather than a deductive method. He preferred that criticism be an art and science the way history is. He saw evidence within literature as important and not a superimposed attitude on literature itself. Frye proposed a systematic criticism that might also be called scientific (7-10). Just as the physicist studies physics, which is based on but is distinct from nature, the critic studies literature, which Frye differentiated from criticism (11). Frye stated it clearly and elegantly: criticism “is to art what history is to action and philosophy to wisdom” (12). He understood the undertow carrying the literary scholar away from literature toward the events of history or the ideas of philosophy, but if criticism were to become systematic in an expanding framework, this undertow would disappear (12). This framing would attempt to answer what literature is, to distinguish between rhythm in verse and prose, to develop a theory of genres, in short a theory of criticism or poetics (13-14). Frye proposed criticism as a science (15-16). For Frye, criticism must be involved in a recognition that it is “a totally intelligible body of knowledge” (16). Unabashedly, Frye advocated for literary masterpieces as the object of study for criticism, and that literature so constituted is an inexhaustible order of words for that study (17). Meaningless criticism was, for Frye, anything that would not build up this systematic criticism: “This includes all the sonorous nonsense that we so often find in critical generalities, reflective comments, ideological perorations, and other conse-

quences of taking a large view of an unorganized subject” (18). The history of taste was not part of the structure of Frye’s criticism (18).

Northrop Frye built on T. S. Eliot’s view that the monuments of literature make up an ideal order and are not simply individual works (18). Frye is not fond of the praise for Middleton Murray for taking a “position,” a term that is *de rigueur* in ideological criticism and theory, because sciences are not about taking a stand or displaying one’s prejudices and errors but being open to the evidence, to learning (19). For Frye, while the sociologist and literary scholar can focus on literature, neither has to pay attention to the other’s methods. The same would be true for a poet or theologian examining a religious poem: they might come to very different conclusions about it. So while, for Frye, if critics need to learn about sociology or theology, that is good, but they do not need, not should, use sociological or theological methods to write criticism (19). In discussing the theory and practice of literature, Frye made a distinction between the producer and practitioner of literature and between the theorist and consumer of literature even if these functions exist in the same person. Frye saw literature as a liberal and humanistic pursuit, which, contrary to the views of some others, meant that it avoided value-judgements (20). Placing judgement and position over values, which came to be basics of ideological criticism and theory, was apt to warp knowledge of literature in the theory of literature than to advance its systematic consolidation and advancement. At the time Frye was writing, he saw value-judgements as being divided into two types –comparative and positive. The comparative subdivided into biographical criticism and tropical criticism, which are rhetorical forms, the one focusing on persuasion and the other on verbal ornament (20-21). In Frye’s view, as poetics were at that time underdeveloped, rhetoric was illegitimately extended into the theory of literature. Rhetorical value-judgements, according to Frye, expressed social values and so the ranking of poets reinforced social preference and moral metaphor (21). Value-judgements thus displace critical experience. Matthew Arnold’s preference for epic and tragedy as expressions of class was an example Frye chose to illustrate this rhetorical-social, what we might call ideological, force against criticism. Arnold would rank poets and would like poetry to take over values from religion, something that was natural at a time when there was a “power vacuum in criticism” (22). This led Frye to what would be an alternative.

Frye proposed a systematic study of literature that alternated “between inductive experience and deductive principles” (22). Even though Frye was not using the word “ideological” much at this time, his description laid the groundwork for his later work in which he explained ideology as it related to mythology:

In criticism rhetorical analysis provides some of the induction, and poetics, the theory of criticism, should be the deductive counterpart. There being no poetics, the critic is thrown back on prejudice derived from his existence as a social being. For prejudice is simply inadequate deduction, as a prejudice in the mind can never be anything but a major premise which is mostly submerged, like an iceberg. (22)

Frye was sympathetic to the role of prejudice, as something submerged that fills the void in a context that has not developed poetics systematically rather than relying on poetics as the ancient Greeks knew them. He admitted that is harder to see new prejudices compared to old ones. The shortcomings of Arnold were more apparent than those of Frye's contemporaries. Frye saw that decorum connected the high, middle and low styles with social class when literary criticism needed to look at works from the vantage of a classless society, something that Arnold himself considered necessary (22-3). Ranking writers, whether based on conservative, Romantic or radical points of view that read genre in terms of social, moral or intellectual analogy, was not, for Frye, the true business of criticism (23). Positions provided for a partial view. In less flattering terms, Frye called this kind of creation of selective tradition "an anxiety neurosis prompted by a moral censor" that is "totally devoid of content" (24). In this way, social dialectics became false rhetoric. In a systematic criticism, Frye envisioned a biographical historic critic who would read everything in the field without hero worship and a historical critic who would read cultural phenomena "in their own context without contemplation of their contemporary application" (24). Frye suggested ethical criticism as opposed to prejudice: "it deals with art as a communication from the past to the present, and is based on the conception of the total and simultaneous possession of past culture" (24). Historical criticism would prevent the translation of cultural phenomena in contemporary terms, but ethical criticism is a counterweight that expresses "the contemporary impact of all art, without selecting a tradition" (25). Frye's scientific criticism argued for a learning that fertilized life, "in which the systematic progress of scholarship flows into the systematic progress of taste and understanding" (25). Progress and totality have generally been two bugbears to postmodern and post-structuralist theories, so that Frye's displacement from their discussions in time might partly be to do with an attempt to keep politics, opinion and ideology from the science of criticism. Frye used Marx's classless society, close reading and historical criticism differently than many of his predecessors, contemporaries and successors. It will become obvious in a systematic criticism that some writers bear more study than others, but belabouring that point is, for Frye, a waste of time and elaborating the obvious. Ethics and aesthetics are not a codification of what is good according to one's own taste

(26). Before Paul de Man, Frye was arguing for how blind critics can be to current prejudices and the wariness they need to have about what they cannot see: "Honest critics are continually finding blind spots in their taste: they discover the possibility of recognizing a valid form of poetic experience without being able to realize it for themselves" (27; see de Man 1971). The language of *anagnorisis* or recognition is important to Frye's criticism (see Hart 2006). Experiencing literature directly is not the lot of critics any more than a direct experience of nature is that of physicists. Both nature and literature need to be interpreted indirectly. In Frye's view, reading literature occurs in the presence of literature and not in criticism. So both are related but separate and should keep their integrity. Frye admitted to subjectivity, but critics look for interconnections among works, so that as readers they may know that the text that is the object of their study is third-rate, but that it is significant because of its importance in relation to something else in literature. Frye's language was sometimes religious with terms like "presence" and "revelation," but he also admitted that he would like to move forward and asked the reader's forgiveness of his own inadequacies because it is important to move forward in this direction towards a systematic criticism (29). Frye also apologized for his polemics and deductive method in terms of his book's principles having exceptions, but he thought he had to take this way because of the limits of a book with an aim of such scope. Frye still insisted on the schematic nature of his study and argued for classification in criticism and schematization in poetics, which was important because the latter is not the same as a "direct experience of literature, where every act is unique, and classification has no place" (29). Frye hoped that his scaffolding would "be knocked away when the building is in better shape" and added that the rest of his book "belongs to the systematic study of the formal causes of art" (29). In the last sentence of the polemical introduction to *Anatomy*, Frye alluded to Aristotle as he departed from him.

So what conclusions did Frye reach? In his "Tentative Conclusion," which is appropriate for a book of "essays" or tries, he tried to place various types of critics of his time into the context of "a comprehensive view of criticism" (341). What Frye hoped to achieve was "a new perspective" on the existing programmes of critics of his time, and he wanted to break down barriers between the different methods of criticism (341). In so doing, Frye wished to keep critics from being caught in one method in which they would look outside of criticism to have contacts with other subjects. Criticism should not be bad comparative religion, semantics or metaphysics, and Frye wanted to use archetypal criticism as a means to lead to dialogue between critical methods. Why myth? It was because myth as *mythos* was "a

structural organizing principle of literary form” (341). This is not, as Frye maintained, to be confused with allegorical criticism (which is found in commentary) because archetypal criticism (which supplements allegorical criticism) begins in the text to be studied and ends with “the structure of literature as a total form” (342). Frye suggested that by seeing that Virgil and Isaiah employed the same kind of imagery to treat the myth of the birth of the hero, it explains why the Nativity Ode was able to use both and thus bring together the connections in scholarship rather than nodes around each figure or poem. Paradoxically, Frye foresaw that breaking down barriers within criticism would in the long-term make “critics more aware of the external relations of criticism as a whole with other disciplines” (342). Frye’s discussion of the progression of modes in his first essay in *Anatomy* involved analogies of aging or maturation in cultural history. That being said, Frye did not want to see this analogy dressed up in a metaphysics that would be a perversion into a foundation for rhetorical value-judgements or some muddle “quasi-organic theory of history” (344, see 343). Art does not, according to Frye, progress and may not improve the artist, but it benefits the readers by humanizing them. A great revolution has occurred since the printing press but also in subsequent technical innovations in the technical ability to study the arts (344). It is difficult to get to the original intention and it would reduce the work if it were stripped to that. Whatever the original intention of the producer of a work in the context of the social function of his or her time, it is the function of the object, that it exists for our pleasure now, that makes it art (344-45). For Frye, the critic recreates the function in a new context.

Frye, as I have also argued elsewhere, is a visionary critic (Hart 1992, 1994). This can be seen in his metaphors as he wrote. His imagery is like Shakespeare’s Richard II’s in prison. The substance of the shadows in Plato’s cave is in ourselves, “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). This again is a secular displacement of a religious experience. Vision and recognition are connected in Frye. It is not only characters who experience *anagnorisis* or its comic equivalent –*cognitio*– but also is an experience that historical criticism produces:

The culture of the past is not only the memory of mankind, but our own buried life, and study of it leads to a recognition scene, a discovery in which we see, not our past lives, but the total cultural form of our present life. It is not only the poet but his reader who is subject to the obligation to “make it new.” (346)

Frye made a typology between past and present on a continuum with the future. The recognition is also that historical and ethical criticism both need correction or culture gets stuck in the past or is projected into the future, and they become forms of selective indoctrination (346; see Cave; Hart 2006). Frye picked up on Arnold's critique of class in which social energy perverts culture to ostentation (upper class), vulgarity (middle class) and squalour (lower class) and maintained that revolution leads to a dictatorship of one class or another (347). Instead, Frye preferred Arnold's axiom that "culture seeks to do away with classes" (347), something he mentioned in the polemical introduction. A liberal education is concerned with imagination in which the ideals exist for a free, classless and urbane society that lifts people clear of the bondage of history (347). According to Frye, "liberal education liberates the works of culture themselves as well as the minds they educate" (347-48). Frye's vision of the work of art was not simply its beauty in and of itself but also as it participates "in the vision of the goal of social effort, the idea of complete and classless civilization" (348). Paradox defined Frye's notion of culture. For him, "Culture is a present social ideal which we educate and free ourselves by trying to attain, and never attain" (348). This is what I have called the asymptotal aspect of meaning in which the writer's text and the reader through time may approach the threshold of insight or understanding but can never quite reach it.

Frye's ethical criticism combined vision and distance. He appealed to *theoria*, as detached vision, in the context of intellectual freedom arising from transvaluation as opposed to being captive to social values arising from prejudice, habit and indoctrination (348). "The goal of ethical criticism," in Frye's view, "is 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" (348). Here, Frye seems to combine William Blake's vision of the infinite man with Arnold's ideas on culture in order to create something innovative. Although John Milton and John Stuart Mill differ on liberty, the one seeing it as potential prophecy, the other as social critique, they both stress "that liberty can begin only with an immediate and present guarantee of the autonomy of culture" (348-49). Frye's *Anatomy* argued for that autonomy for literature and criticism from other disciplines but also from each other even if they are related.

Frye also came to argue for what he considered to be a principle of humanism "that the freedom of man is inseparably bound up with his acceptance of his cultural heritage" (349). He also reminded the reader that in the second essay he had argued that moving from the individual work of art to the total form of art, the art becomes an ethical instrument that participates

in civilization and is no longer an object of aesthetic contemplation (349). Poetry is an established pattern of words that may remain more or less unchanged but whose interpretation and reinterpretation, through criticism, change according to history (349). Frye never settled on purity and separation, so, like the New Critics before him and the deconstructionists afterward, he saw the rhetorical nature of all language. He said that his last essay in *Anatomy* argued for “the principle that all structures of 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). Surprisingly, for Frye, who championed the independence of literature and criticism, he appealed to a larger context. If we are to accept this argument on the structure of words, “then our literary universe has expanded into a verbal universe, and no aesthetic principle of self-containment will work” (350). Like mathematics, literature has pure and applied manifestations and both proceed “by hypothetical possibilities” (351). And literature is not alone in this. This connection might well be seen in Leibniz’s possible world theory, which is used in game theory, mathematics, philosophy and literary theory (see Hart 1988, 2006). Later Frye would recreate a similar point to include music. As Frye said in *The Educated Imagination* (1963), mathematics “is really one of the languages of the imagination, along with literature and music” (Frye 1963: 6).

Frye asked whether literature like mathematics is substantively and not simply incidentally useful (Frye 1957: 352). Although in discussing the constructive and descriptive aspect of discursive verbal structures, that is form and content, Frye returned to discovery and recognition, he did not go as far as some deconstructive views in arguing that theology, metaphysics, law and the social sciences are based on myth and metaphor only. Frye did, however, allow that such poetic myths were important to constructs like those in theology, science and metaphysics (353). Plato, according to Frye, saw the relation of myth to argument and saw apprehension in terms of mathematics and myth (354). Frye continued with his own connecting of mathematics and poetry: “Literature, like mathematics, is a language, and a language in itself represents no truth, though it may provide the means for expressing any number of them” (354). These two languages are different ways to conceive of the universe. All verbal constructs, Frye argued, whether literature, law or metaphysics, show their mythical and metaphorical outlines the further we push them (354). For Frye, the work of the critic is to reforge “the broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept” (354). Frye spoke a critical and theoretical language without which it would be difficult to imagine the North American reception of structural-

ism and poststructuralism and all the other more recent critical and theoretical developments since the appearance of *Anatomy*. Still, in Paul Ricoeur's view during the 1980s, Frye's typology in *Anatomy* did not have "any recourse to the structuralists' narratological rationality" and his order of paradigms had an interesting relation to history: "Neither ahistorical not historical, it is rather transhistorical, in the sense that it traverses history in a cumulative and not simply an additive mode" (Ricoeur 2, 13). In the early 1990s, Julia Kristeva saw that *Anatomy* provided critical approaches that decompartmentalized "the technical enclosures" that contemporary theory delights in and aspired "to a capable interdisciplinarity" while she agreed with Frye's suggestion in *The Critical Path* (1971) "that we centre the educational program in this communal mythology that we have inherited from the Bible, from the Greeks and Romans" (Kristeva 336). The reception of Frye could be mixed, as in a book on postmodernism that focuses on myth and truth in literature by Colin Falck, because there is, as Frye himself realized in *Anatomy*, a tension between the understanding of individual poems and the schemes of literary theory like that of Frye (Falck 88-90, see 24, 60, 152). Frye himself had to respond not just to this his most influential work –*Anatomy*– but to those who came after it and who, even without being aware or admitting it, were indebted to him. A dialogue between mythology and ideology ensued in this context.

2. *Mythology and ideology beyond the "Anatomy"*

What is the difference between story and argument? Perhaps there is only story-argument at the end of the day (see Hart 1991). In discussing these matters, I will use Northrop Frye, one of my teachers, as a guide to mythology and ideology. Without him, I would not have made this distinction this way. At the end of this essay, I will add more of my own variations on this theme. Whereas Marxists and others since the 1960s often saw that content was the key to literature, as if it were an argument or a key to the workings of society, class, gender and other pressing issues, Frye observed a play between genre and theme, so much so that if anything the form affected the content. A story told or showed in one genre would not be the same as it would be in another genre.

Frye recognized the debased form of myth as misconception and delusion. He also realized its structural, narrative, cognitive, existential, and social dimensions. As Frye's critical theory made language to be of primary importance, myth and metaphor, which in our context are made of words,

were considered as interpenetrable aspects of literature, criticism, and human culture. Particularly, in the last decade of his life, Frye, who died in January 1991, often discussed mythology in relation to ideology. He considered ideology to be a crucial subject. Frye saw mythology as being basic to it.³ For Frye, myth was expressed through the imaginative and hypothetical nature of literature. He viewed mythology as something more fundamental than ideology but more marginalized and vulnerable. In Frye's paradox, mythology, when translated in literature and explained in criticism, might resist the power of dominant ideologies and the political pressures on writers, scholars, and critics. For some time now, I have argued that myth was Frye's hope against the desolate record of human history and especially tyranny. Myth in literature was, for Frye, the rising up of the proletariat into a classless society and the return of the repressed in a vision of hope and regeneration. This is a social function of literature that creates a human community that cares for the basic needs of its members. The desire to live, eat, love, create, and move about freely is, as Frye argued, basic to members of a society. George Steiner captured the ideological bind succinctly: "Ideologies and the mutual hatreds they generate are territories of the mind" (Steiner 1998: 61). These are virtual territorial wars with the dire consequences of conflict over actual turf, the kind Hamlet gleans in Act IV, scene four from the Norwegian captain in that play seemed to scorn when speaking about the wars as gaining "a little patch of ground" and which Hamlet sees as finding "quarrel in a straw/When honour's at the stake." Frye sought to fight against ideological conflicts by seeking something more basic that could attend to people's needs and bring them together. This is the social dimension of Frye's view of metaphor and myth.

2.1. Frye is part of a European tradition that has defended literature against the attacks on fiction that Plato, the Church Fathers and their successors helped to sustain. Poetry and the theatre were particularly vulnerable to this criticism (see Barish). This attack on the making or representation of fictions, considered literature to lack moral or philosophical seriousness, to be demonic deceitful, seductive and parodic. Literature is vulnerable in society. Frye defended its dignity, autonomy, and significance in the face of the political, social, ethical and semantic systems that humans make. Literature needs defending because of human ignorance and ideology. It is worth defending because the literary offers us means to regenerate ourselves and our society. Frye's work is a visionary alternative to ideological attacks on literature.

Frye thought that ideology pervades society and influences and affects literature. He was sceptical about the manipulation of meaning as an ideologi-

cal force and sensed the vulnerability of the writer, critic, and texts before the ideological policing of the state and its special interests. He considered language to be opaque and problematic in making meaning and saw literature as being in society but as being able in an intricate process to translate itself and its readers beyond ideology. Something Frye advocated for was the idea that literature and literary criticism are autonomous. Even though both use anthropology, psychology, history, philosophy, and other fields, they translate them through the imagination. Frye, as I argued some while ago now, used a theoretical imagination and was a theorist of the imagination (see Hart 1994a).

Imagination –which was always important, as in Lucretius’ sense of the sublime and Theseus’ description of the poet at Act V, scene v in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*– was a key to Romanticism. Frye, like William Blake before him, saw the embodiment of the poetic and religious in the imagination (see Frye 1947). As a poet and critic or theorist, I find Frye’s emphasis on metaphor and myth suggestive. These figures help to make the phrases and structures of the texts we decide to call literary. Metaphor and narrative (*muthos* or *mythos*, or story) are building blocks. During the time of student unrest in the late 1960s, Frye once said that literary critics get their clues to such a social situation of anxiety by examining “the emotional values attached to metaphors” (Frye 1969: 45; see Hart 1994 ch. 6; Hart 1997). An imaginative reconstruction of a world recreates the unity of subject and object. Northrop Frye anchored his theory in metaphor, myth, and imagination. These are the stuff of poetry. Theory and poetry meet in the imagination.

Frye’s preference for myth in the face of ideology has roots in his emphasis on the imagination. The classifications in Frye’s theory –which came from his reading of William Blake, other literature, and the Bible– constituted a grammar of the imagination. Frye’s notion of literature as a critique was a counterpoise against a ubiquitous and inescapable ideology. A key illustrative passage occurs within *Words with Power*: “As literature asserts nothing but simply holds up symbols and illustrations, it calls for a suspension of judgment, as well as varieties of reaction, that, left to itself, could be more corrosive of ideologies than any radical skepticism” (24). In this view, the putative becomes a way to criticize the ways of life, and both involve a connection between actual and possible worlds (see Hart 1988). In such a view, literature and its study become a critique rather than an embodiment of ideology, which is a fractured term that can range from meaning false consciousness to an all pervasive condition of human existence (see Plamenatz 15-31; Kavanagh). Destutt de Tracy, a French philosopher of the late eighteenth

century, used the term as a science of ideas that was part of the empiricist tradition (Williams 56, see Plamenatz 15).

Various theorists used “ideology” as a charged term in the decades following the Second World War. A few examples of such theorists should help to clarify Frye’s views in context. Whereas Roland Barthes wrote about mythology as ideology, and ideology was a term from the period from the end of the 1950s, especially for the generation of 1968, Frye attempted to use mythology as a way of helping to restore the importance of poetry and poetics (see Barthes 1957). Frye sought the restoration of the *mythos* of literature, what might be said to be its very story or plot as opposed to content. Raymond Williams saw three principal aspects of “ideology” in Marxism: a system of beliefs of a class or group; a system of false ideas or consciousness in contrast with true or scientific knowledge; the process of producing ideas and meanings (Williams 55). So, as in Frye, in Marxist thought, ideology could mean manufactured ideas against truth and knowledge. In both cases, there was a mixture of ideology as negative and positive, something mixed with truth, knowledge and the wisdom of stories. Terms often become stretched. In 1977, Williams was asking (55-71): will the terms “ideology” and “ideological” do? Like Williams, Frye was dissatisfied with ideology as an all-inclusive term. Whatever their differences, Frye and Williams realized that the language complicates a theory of literature, and both these theorists resisted the reduction of literature to content. Form and content, especially in literature, created an imaginative interplay between text and context. As Frye and his critics have suggested, there is a delicate balance between individual and collective. Throughout Frye’s career, he wrote against tyranny at both extremes of individualism and collectivism.⁴

2.2. Northrop Frye’s writing found its motive in metaphor (see Denham in Frye 1990a: xiv). Frye examined the metaphors, myths, images, symbols, genres and worlds found particularly in literature and has been concerned with the transhistorical communication that literature makes possible. He concentrated on the forms of writing or genres, the social function of literature, criticism and education, the way literature is made of literature, the workings of mythology, the attempt to find unity and redeem the fall or divided ground of language and literature and the power of the imagination. After 1980, Frye was interested in discussing ideology, and he placed mythology before ideology (Denham xvi-xvii; Frye 1990b, 1991, and Hamilton). Where does fact end and interpretation begin and are not all conclusions premises have been two persistent questions I asked as a student and subsequently I reframed these in terms of what the relation is between story

and argument. Mythology and ideology, story and argument are hard to distinguish. Like Frye, I recognize the importance of the similarities and differences between them, but I also realize that these comparisons and distinctions are more readily made in practice than proved in theory.

My own interest is in the distinction between history on the one hand and literary and legal fictions on the other. What gives an historical interpretation or legal fiction any more authority than a literary fiction like poetry and the theatre? Historical poetry, drama and fiction also muddy the waters of distinguishing between fact and fiction, event and interpretation, actual and fictional (possible) world. For Frye, interpretation meant principally reading or writing about the Bible and literature.

As the vast corpus of Frye's work might extend this essay beyond its bounds, I am concentrating most on his works as they relate to this specific cluster of questions that centre on the relation between mythology and ideology. He discussed mythology in the context of literary criticism, so that "myth" means *mythos*, story, plot, narrative (Frye 1990a: 3). Frye said that myth and metaphor are inseparable because myth annihilates the space between A and B in time and metaphor does the same in space. Both myth and metaphor are counterlogical (7-8). "The Koine of Myth," has much to do with the relation of story to history. Poetry keeps alive, in Frye's view, the metaphorical habit of mind, and gods are metaphors. Language and metaphor were at the heart of Frye's mythological universe.

Text and context are in tension in the life and writing. Writers are torn between their vision and society's demands and can suffer persecution and death for ideological reasons. Frye was not naive about the power of ideology but he refused to celebrate it. He was wary of ideological hardliners, whether religious, economic or political (20). What has priority was more important to Frye. He reiterated his myths of concern, which are the ground for life. For Frye, primary concern is the primitive view that life is better than death, freedom better than bondage, happiness better than misery, and secondary concern is ideology, or loyalty to one's place in religion, society, politics and class structure. The challenge lies in Frye's view that ideology has always had more power and prestige than primary concerns have. The revolution Frye proposed, like the one Einstein mentioned with the advent of nuclear power, is a matter of new thinking for survival. According to Frye, if we wish to survive, we must now choose, for the first time in history, primary over secondary concerns. Ideology is a key to poetry but can be evaded because whereas history and culture condition poets, their poetry eludes being only ideological (21). At the centre of this debate is language. Frye wondered whether language uses humanity or humanity language (22). Part of this response to ide-

ology is a new and perhaps heroic struggle given the odds against it. Frye's proposal represented an attempt to use the criticism of literature as "a remedy for the abuses of ideology" even though past attempts have not been successful (24). Counter-movements of myth and metaphor into "a world of recovered identity" were part of Frye's proposed bulwark against ideology. This countervailing would work against the annihilations of time and the alienations of space, where, for a moment, a sense of reality replaces our usual fear of the unknown (26-27). Criticism is an opening up of possibilities. Frye argued that in the full critical operation, there must be a catharsis of belief, which belongs to ideology. Criticism should, however, open up to us more intense paradoxes and self-contradictions, allowing for a greater awareness of ourselves and of something not ourselves. Recognition, as Aristotle knew, was a key to the interpretation of poetry (see Hart 2006, esp. 1-72). At this moment in Frye, we find, as I said a long time ago now, the paradoxical recognition of paradoxes of recognition, of a brief but necessary renewal (see Hart 1992a).

Myth is built on metaphor, and symbols relate closely to metaphors. Frye elaborated on symbol as a medium of exchange. It was as a token or counter with a double nature, but also something completed by its context and its relation to something outside of words (1990a: 28, 32). Frye noted that, since Aristotle, critics have often seen the distinguishing mark of the poet as the ability to think metaphorically (34). For Frye, poetry speaks the language of unconscious and conscious, of emotion and intelligence. *Mythos* is built on metaphor, which is the heart of poetry. In Frye's theoretical world, a very conscious verbal construct, like a metaphysical system, is founded on less conscious metaphorical constructs. In Frye's literary realm, criticism must recognize the creativity of metaphor in poetic language and that only another metaphor can describe a metaphor (36-37). Metaphor is inescapable. What is at stake is the motive of metaphor and thus of myth. Stories are myths. Frye's interest in narrative and conceptual and theoretical discourses relates to his interest in "concern." By this, he meant a conscious awareness because societies attempt to come to terms with life through theory and stories. In Frye's schema, there were traditionally two types of stories –the sacred and the secular. The sacred has its own power of words. The Bible is a mythology of concern for Western Europe and its former colonies in the New World (44). Frye also understood the importance of the secular: he was interested in the appearance and reality of social and literary conventions. Like other important types of verbal expression, literature has authority. It is not, in Frye's view, ancillary (70). There need not be any apologies for poetry as a weak and dependent form of language. To study literature and the arts is

to bring us a vision of a new world (77-78). For much of his life, Frye was fascinated with these apocalyptic glimpses into the imaginative world (78). Metaphor absorbs the world and universe in its own myth.

The metaphorical human subsumes all nature in a kind of identification. In Frye's view, convention, genre and metaphor are related through identity. There is, for Frye, no unmediated vision, but the poet's quest for it is a quest for the recovery of myth primarily through the identity in metaphor and metaphorical structures between the natural and the human (86, 88, 90). Frye outlined the interaction between mythology and ideology in the literary. He maintained that literature always reflects ideology in its content but that its shape, as defined by convention and genre, looks back to mythological time (89). Ideology, according to Frye, is metonymic because it is used as a substitute structure of authority for an ideal one (90). For him, criticism is the theory of the language of myth and metaphor and can study the assumptions on which ideology is based and the mythological structures that literature recreates directly. Ideology, as Frye saw it, is the framework that surrounds us daily in its many forms (91). Communication is as important for the sacred as it is for the secular. Frye concerned himself with the metaphorical power of the Bible, which is the mythological basis for Western literature.

2.3. The reader of the Bible and of literature experience imagination and identity. Frye maintained that, through a study of language, boundaries dissolve. The division between creators and critics falls away because criticism is recreation (Frye 1990a: 108). Frye stressed the ecstatic metaphor, the sense of identity between an individual's consciousness and something in nature (111-12). Nevertheless, literature is also hypothetical and displays ironic detachment from all statements of assertion. It is a kind of model-thinking, "an infinite set of possibilities of experience to expand and intensify our actual experience" (114). This theory has something akin to possible world and fictional world theories.

Metaphor and myth in the Bible and literature have their differences. The possible and the actual, the diachronic and the synchronic occur in tension in sacred and secular texts. The Bible is metaphorical, but, unlike literature, is not content with ironic removal from assertion or experience. This dissimilarity led Frye, after the *Anatomy of Criticism*, to examine the cultural context of metaphor (114). The vanishing act of temporality makes it difficult to glean something clear from it. In time there is ideology. Frye saw metaphorical and mythological recreation as a way of seeing what is beneath ideology, what conditions us, and what social function we actually fill. There is a construction of reality written with the craft of the imagination.

The theoretical imagination is central to Frye's vision of literature and criticism (see Hart 1994a). The critic needs imagination but also has to engage the world. Frye concerned himself with the responsibilities and importance of the critic. "Vision" was also a recurrent theme in Frye's corpus. This term involves *theoria*, human vision and thought, and *praxis*, human actions. Theory and practice were closely related in Frye's view of the close but distinct relation between literature and criticism.

One of the contexts for literature is the religious ground of the society in which it finds itself. Frye's exploration of religion involved language, meaning, literature and history. Imagination brings these subjects together. In *The Modern Century* (1967), Frye was working out his idea of myths of concern (Frye 1990a: 105-06, see Frye 1967 and Denham 1978). At times, it is difficult to distinguish between mythology as Roland Barthes and Frye set out in the 1950s and 1960s with ideology as it is later discussed from the 1960s onward. Northrop Frye responded, as A. C. Hamilton has argued, to the mythopoeic literature of the modern age and the need to make sense of the chaotic critical scene in the central decades of this century (Hamilton, x). Hamilton said that each of Frye's works after *Anatomy* represents a brief version of it, and each article an even briefer version (xi). Frye's view of literature is that it is a human apocalypse, a kind of inter-human revelation. The mythological and ideological are interdependent. Creation and recreation connect writing, reading and criticism/ theory.

For Frye, however, the religious and spiritual impulses connected his lifelong interest in religion and literature. The Bible was a subject that interested Frye throughout his life. It provided a subject for his last major project, consisting of three books published between 1982 and 1991: *The Great Code*, *Words with Power*, and *The Double Vision*. Frye said that many contemporary critics and theorists were talking about the Bible even when avoiding it: "many critical theories are obscurely motivated by a God-is-dead syndrome that also arose from biblical criticism" (Frye 1990a: 229). Frye saw the literal meaning of the Bible as being mythical and metaphorical (232). He argued that questions of biblical criticism served as models for numerous critical questions about secular literature. Moreover, he maintained that we find that the otherness is the text itself (233). The Bible ends with a vision at the end of time and history and its reality begins in the reader's mind after reading. The Bible is not historical but mythical because myth is the only way to revelation (240). Frye's interest in metaphor and its relation to mythology is key to an understanding of his criticism and theory. The language of myth and metaphor is self-contained. *Anagnorisis* is once more important for Frye. In his view, secular and criticism rely on the recreation of

identity in metaphor as a recognition or revelation (254). The central myth in the Bible he stated in words that echo *Anatomy*: it is a vision of a present that makes the new by reshaping the old (269).

Just as *The Educated Imagination* and *The Modern Century* distilled the core of Frye's views on literature, *The Double Vision* did so with the religious dimension of his thought (see Frye 1963, 1967, 1991, see Frye 1971). As George Steiner noted in 1974, in the preceding 150 years, the political and philosophical history of the West involved a number of attempts "to fill the central emptiness left by the erosion of theology" (Steiner 1974: 2). The same could be said for poetry as in Matthew Arnold's attempt to fill that void with poetry and the study of poetry. Frye sought to bring religion and literature together in a study of language. In *The Double Vision*, Frye returned to his myths of concern. Human beings have primary and secondary concerns. The primary, as we have seen, are food, sex, property, and freedom of movement—the concerns we share with animals on a physical level. The secondary concerns include our religious, political and other ideological loyalties.

Although Frye did not discount "ideology," which for many traditionalists and liberals is a menacing word to be repressed or dismissed because it threatens traditional values or freedom respectively, he chose "mythology" as a term that is primary to the ideological. Frye was the master of reiteration and so repeated this familiar idea repeatedly: "All through history ideological concerns have taken precedence over primary ones" (Frye 1991: 6). Never one to shy away from contradiction, paradox and ambivalence, which have been key terms in literary studies for the past century, Frye stated the human predicament: "We want to live and love, but we go to war; we want freedom, but depend on the exploiting of other peoples, of the natural environment, even of ourselves" (6). This assessment of our putting ideology first accurately describes one of the main reasons why we choose not to feed, clothe, shelter and educate all human beings.

One of the key distinctions for Frye, as we have noted, was that between the spiritual element of primary concerns and the ideological concerns. Repeatedly, Frye was concerned about tyranny, which comes from within, and asserts that humans are products of nature and of social and ideological conditioning (13). Spirituality, for him, might be a way of completing the person and of undoing alienation. Frye appealed to the New Testament, which represents the human being emerging from the natural and social into the full worlds of the individual, which is a kind of resurrection or rebirth. Recapping his views over the years, Frye said that the organizing principles of literature are myth (story or narrative) and metaphor (figured language). This world Frye calls "completely liberal" because of the freedom of spiritual

movement. The implication is, then, that even though literature incorporates our ideological concerns, it devotes itself mainly to primary ones. Literature “does everything for people except transform them. It creates a world that the spirit can live in, but it does not make us spiritual beings” (16). Literature is a means, an enabler, an open possibility for spirituality, but it cannot create that. Frye’s last words in the last posthumous book that he had intended for publication are an exhortation to vision. They are an apocalyptic hermeneutic. This double vision based on uniqueness and unity. In the years since Frye came to this conclusion and since his death, his words on inflexible zeal are chilling. Frye’s double vision involves a moving away from literal domination where zealots call on words to back up a totalitarian and ruthless God. This zealousness has haunted and continues to haunt our world. There is also a movement away from the literal disintegration of exegetes breaking up texts. This double vision is a counterpoise to parodic literalism. It occurs where the Logos unites mind and nature and where the spiritual and physical worlds are simultaneously present. It is, according to Frye, where each moment we live though and die out of into another order, where we live in the resurrection here and now (83-85). This is the eternal now that Frye’s work led up to, from Blake to the Bible. Behind Frye’s work is Blake’s human form divine, the Christ in us all, here and now, witnessed through the visionary company we are all apart of. In this culmination, Frye combined his passion for the divine and human comedy with that for the typological vision of the spiritual and physical world. Metaphor and myth are an embodiment of the apocalypse of a theoretical imagination that arises from the literary imagination and compliments it while it distinguishes itself from it.

2.4. Frye preferred the word “myth” to “ideology.” He saw the ideological as a threat to literature and criticism and bristled at the subordination of the literary to the political (Frye 1957: 119). The identity of metaphor and the displacement of metonymy –from Roman Jakobson onwards– raises the question of the nature of argument and writing. Story or *muthos* and argument or the instrument of ideas may have distinct qualities but they can also mix. In my own writing, I have suggested the name “story-argument” for criticism motivated by narrative techniques (Hart 1991).

Sometimes it seems that which came first the story or the argument, mythology or argument is difficult to say. Did the instruments of directions, plans for food, shelter and survival come before the need for stories? The relation between mythology and ideology is a troubled one. The mythology I have proposed in my own work is not the return to purity or the fear of the stranger but rather that speech and writing that have the power of openness

over time, an expression that opens readers and audience to experience and thought. Perhaps poetry is, through the metaphorical urge, a recreation of the animistic impulse. It is possible that this unity, of humans as being at one with nature, is fallen from the start, but poetry, at least in its pastoral and comic forms, recreates moments of harmony and unity. It is possible that poetry makes the world alive again even if the reader resists this union of subject and object or leaves it for the fallen world of split subjects when the poem is over. Poetry is mythological because of the what if of story that is not part of history. Historical poems and fiction blur the distinction and suggest how knotted the possibility of poetry or literature is tied up with the actuality of history. Here, mythology and ideology are especially bound together. Poetry is a matter of craft as well as imagination: the classical and romantic meet in our modern construals of the poetic and of criticism or theory of poetry or literature. In speaking about craft, the poet or *poietaes*, is the maker of created things, or *poiema*, who shows skill and art, or *tekhne*, in this making. Representation complicates this matter further. *Theoria* is a contemplation. It is a speculation that can be a representation, thought as a mirror for the world, or an idea apart from it. A *theorem*, however, is a proposition that needs to be proved or an idea that has been proven or is thought to be true. And *theorein* means to observe. The relation between making and theory, poetry and philosophy is difficult and can be oppositional, in particular in relation to ideology. The discussion of poets in Plato's *Republic* illustrates this point, as poets are supposed to support the state or go into exile.

Mythology is expressed through the imaginative and hypothetical nature of literature: it is of its time but communicates across time. Poetry is mythology translated in literature and explained to the culture in criticism or theory in such a way as to have a double movement. This doubleness seems to embody and resist the power of dominant ideologies and the political pressures brought to bear on writers, scholars, and critics. Perhaps, as I have said elsewhere, myth might be a hope against the desolate record of human history and against tyranny. Northrop Frye, as we have observed, considered myth in literature as the rising up of the proletariat into a classless society and the return of the repressed. We also saw that Frye returned to Marx and Freud, as well as to William Blake and others, to help create his vision of hope and regeneration. The social function of literature, according to Frye, was to create a human community that cares for the basic needs of its members. In part, Frye's theory, although also something different, was a later and important contribution in the tradition of defences of poetry in English that Sidney and Shelley are perhaps most representative.

Theory and practice, frameworks of seeing a subject, and close attention to texts inform literary studies, which has its roots in editing, biblical hermeneutics, rhetoric, and philology. Poetry, the centre of those studies, grows out of the aristocratic ideals of classical literature. What is important is to speak against prevailing opinion and even to engage with even *doxa* or *anti-doxa* that has become *doxa* while paying attention to changes in historical contexts. What is also called the *doxy* is not something effectively tested or proved but a set of ideological attitudes. It derives from the Greek meaning opinion and originally pertained to religious or theological matters but now more generally to the cultural, political and social. The poetics suggests as a countervailing matter indeterminacy, gnomic utterance, qualities of parable, so that ideology can briefly be understood, evaded or escaped. Poetry can be a critique of critique as well as of life. It is important to distinguish the parodic and ideological use of myth from this putative and recreative kind. There is something possible, fictional, and putative about the poetic, but it can be as political.

Humans interpret. We make stories, theories, arguments, and then interpret those. Culture is lived interpretation. People and peoples participate in an interpretation of interpretation. A persistent and vexed question is where does fact end and interpretation begins. Seeing is not so straightforward. Sometimes it appears to be vision and wisdom coming together and sometimes it is seeming and full of error. Perhaps seeing is a constant adjustment of both these attitudes together. The recognition of recognition is that the way of seeing in literature or the humanities, although cognate with observation and discovery in science, is not identical to it. The problem of *mimesis* is inextricably bound up with interpretation and recognition. Plato, as Cornford notes, extended *mimesis* to something akin to what we mean by “representation” in English. Plato also used *mimetes* as we would artist, and considered the work of art is a likeness or image (*eikon*) of the original, holding up a mirror up to nature (see Cornford 323-4, see xxvii-xxix). Northrop Frye differed from the Platonic Socrates, who argued that knowledge cannot be gained by studying the poet’s picture in words or representation of life, including his portraits of heroic characters. Socrates took this view because he thought that poets do not work with a conscious intelligence but from inspiration. Socrates said that poets used a beautiful language without understanding its meaning, so that they could not instruct us through descriptions of chariots or of war. Without making leading critical theorists of the post-war of a piece, I would say that Northrop Frye’s double vision, Roland Barthes’s double sign, and Derrida’s double writing might well differ on the notion of the integration and disinte-

gration of texts, but recognition and misrecognition through reading and interpretation concern them all (see Hart 2006).

Experience and reading, the concrete and the abstract, all bear on how we see and what insights, small and large, we have. Eric Auerbach, Northrop Frye, and Terence Cave concentrated on recognition in literature, but texts beyond the literary have moments of recognition (see Auerbach). Carlo Ginzburg, a historian, expressed his work in terms of recognition and discovery (Ginzburg 1989: xii). Images, tropes and metaphors even affect those who write about history, that is about events and the story of those events. Students might also have recognitions about their teachers as well as their teachings and the subject they teach. Northrop Frye was one of my teachers and a teacher to many and one who produced many teaching books (as he referred to them). His views on poetics, language and secular and sacred texts in the Bible and literature and their social context have influenced me and many others, even those who deny or repudiate that possibility. The opening up that Frye saw in a creative and recreative present that engages with the past and future in the difficult circumstances of temporality is still suggestive. The communication between writer and reader is an imaginative act in theory and practice.

NOTES

1. In this essay I am trying to concentrate more on *Anatomy of Criticism* than I did in my earlier work on mythology and ideology, such as my paper at the conference, "The Legacy of Northrop Frye," Victoria College, Toronto, 29-31 October 1992, or in chapter 7 of my book, *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination*, which was finished and ready to go at Routledge in 1992 but which was published in 1994, or my article on the ends on ideology, published in *Comparative Literature* in 1995. Although I draw on my other essays on Frye and writing, education, fiction, anatomy, myth and metaphor, I am interested in new patterns and contexts for this material (see Hart 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2006). One reason I refer to much but not all my writing on Frye is to avoid too much repetition and to allow readers to see, if they so choose, how I have developed this and related topics elsewhere.
2. On the creation and reception of *Anatomy*, see Ayre, 256-67, and for an engaging conversation about the book between Northrop Frye and David Cayley, see Cayley 68-88.
3. On ideology, see Adams, Decker, Eagleton 2007, Ewick, Good, Hawkes, Inglis, McGann and Privateer; on mythology, see Casapo, Leeming, Leonard and McClure, and Mali. On writing and difference, see Derrida.

4. During the 1970s and the 1980s, many literary theorists took a turn away from the mythological and the putative space of the literary imagination. Catherine Belsey preferred dialectical materialism to Frye's classless society in the imagination (Belsey 28; Frye 1957: 347-48). Belsey wanted human action in society and thinks that criticism cannot be detached from society and has ideological and social implications (29). In Northrop Frye's work, Terry Eagleton found an emphasis on the utopian root of literature that results from "a deep fear of the actual social world, a distaste for history itself" (1983: 93). In *Anatomy*, Frye claimed to be engaged in historical criticism in the face of other forms of criticism that were claiming to be historical without being so. Eagleton considered Frye, like Matthew Arnold, to be a liberal humanist whose free, classless and urbane society was a universalizing of liberal middle class values. Maggie Humm was sometimes critical of feminist and patriarchal myth criticism: "But if feminist critics overemphasise the Utopian root of literature, often male critic –like Frye and McLuhan– use myth as a displaced version of religion to avoid socially realisable goals" (100). Responding to Humm, Janet Todd noted that the mythological excitement that occurred in feminism during the mid-1970s showed some dependence on male myth criticism in vogue in the 1950s and 1960s, especially after Frye's *Anatomy*, but the feminist mythology had its own motifs and messages (Todd 30). Has the late Frye elaborated a position on ideology beyond that in the *Anatomy*, which Belsey and others have examined because of the fame and centrality of the book to criticism in English?

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