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Introduction

Herman Northrop Frye (July 14, 1912–January 23, 1991) was misunderstood for decades as a literary taxonomist or member of the archetypal school of literary criticism. Since the late 1970s his work has been subjected to wide reappraisal, revealing not only that his entire output was the result of a highly personal project but also that a spiritual quest and social mission runs throughout. While wrestling with William Blake’s perplexing symbolism as a divinity student in the 1930s, the centrality of biblical imagery in the literary canon became clear to him. From this project Frye’s critical method evolved, as he attempted to perfect a systematic approach to literature that could render any text comprehensible. Frye was astoundingly prolific, writing over thirty books and producing hundreds of book chapters, journal articles, book reviews, editorials, lectures, occasional papers, and sermons. Frye usually wrote about literature, but he also wrote on Christianity and other religions, on education, culture and politics, film, and painting. Situated within the University of Toronto for most of his life, he championed Canadian literature and art before it was fashionable to do so and even produced a handful of short stories. His writings have been assembled and edited to form the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, a collection of thirty volumes published by the University of Toronto Press in an immense project that began in 1993 and took just under two decades to complete. The Pratt Library of Victoria University at the University of Toronto holds a huge archive, including copies of literary works hand-annotated by Frye, these notations providing the most recent primary texts for Frye scholars to dig through for fresh material and insight. Despite his enormous output, Frye tells the same story over and over, of the revelatory and redemptive power of the written word. Frye believed that an education in the humanities was the basis of a democratic society. His “concern and freedom” thesis promotes a stance that is both imaginative and critical; laying between the two extremes of conservatism and radicalism, it promotes thinking beyond the simple reiteration of societal norms and values, without tipping into a potentially hazardous laissez-faire. Politically, Frye can be best described as a left-leaning liberal who, so committed to his belief in the social mission of literary criticism, frequently produced populist and accessible versions of his key ideas to disseminate these to a general audience.

The other sections are:

*Anatomy of Criticism*; Commentaries and Introductions to *Anatomy of Criticism*; Negative Responses to *Anatomy of Criticism*; Biographies and Contextual Approaches; Canadian Literature and Culture; William Blake; Romanticism; The Bible, Christianity and Religion; *The Great Code, Words with Power*, and *The Double Vision*; ‘Interpenetration’; The University and Education; Politics and Cultural Theory; *The Critical Path* and Other Primary Texts; Shakespeare; Literary Criticism; Reappraisals and Retrospectives; Eastern, Western and Other Perspectives; Miscellaneous Writings; Archives, Finding Aids and Blogs; Bibliographies and Indexes to the Primary Texts.