

Michael Dolzani, ed. *Northrop Frye's Notebooks on Romance*. Collected Works of Northrop Frye, 15. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. lxii + 503 pp. \$95.

Northrop Frye's literary career proved the exception to most rules. After a few early articles in Canadian journals, he achieved international fame overnight with the publication of his first book, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947). He then wrote a series of high profile articles for literary journals, mostly in the U.S., that he gathered and transformed into the immensely influential *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957). His posthumous publications have also been unusual. In 1996, only five years after his death, *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye* began to appear, and they began where the collected works of other writers tend to end, with volumes of letters, diaries, and notebooks. Scholarly editions of the *Anatomy* and *Fearful Symmetry* are now in active preparation, but even before they are printed Frye's readers have access to his personal reflections about these and other books. Such readers, whose interests include religion and culture as well as literature, are fortunate indeed.

Nietzsche's readers had to wait almost seventy years after his death for a scholarly edition of the *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, to which Frye makes reference, having had first to deal with his sister's selective arrangement in *Der Wille zur Macht*. Jung's readers have still to see most of his *Rotbuch* or any of his *Schwarzbuch*, access to which has been blocked by heirs and given only recently to the Philemon Foundation. Readers of Samuel Butler and James George Frazer, who edited their own notebooks, will never know what materials were discarded in the process. However, Frye's readers have an embarrassment of riches. Those who prefer a bedside book have *Northrop Frye Unbuttoned: Wit and Wisdom from the Notebooks and Diaries*, selected by the immensely energetic Robert D. Denham, who knows the unpublished materials better than anyone else. Those who want the original context but without the complications of Frye's crabbed handwriting have the "late notebooks" and Bible notebooks edited by Denham, as well as the letters and diaries. Now they have two volumes edited by Denham's associate Michael Dolzani, who once served as Frye's research assistant. The notebooks connected with Frye's projected but unwritten "third book" after *Fearful Symmetry* and the *Anatomy* appeared in 2003, and those connected with his work on literary romance appeared at the end of 2004.

Unlike Nietzsche, who kept one notebook at a time, Frye used different notebooks for different subjects, often returning to one after a space

of many months or years. Except in diaries, he seldom dated the entries. The result is a challenge for editors, who must guess the approximate dates from occasional references to events in Frye's world or the world at large. It poses a challenge for readers as well when entries in one volume of the edited notebooks are related to items in another. Dolzani acknowledges that some of the notes on romance touch on speculations in the "third book" notebooks, others on material in "late notebooks," and still others on the *Anatomy* notebooks, which Denham is currently editing. He puts the best face on the chaos, in the opening page of his fine introduction, when he compares the notes to the buried treasure in romances like Poe's. The reader must be prepared for a quest, with some long dry stretches but not without surprises and rewards for the persistent.

As he entered his sixties, Frye became prone to writer's cramp and began taking notes on his beloved Selectric typewriters. More than half of the material in the present volume is taken from typescripts, presumably first drafts. (The volume includes no illustrations of the original pages, so it is difficult to know how rough they are, but Frye was a proficient touch typist with business school training.) In all, there are nine handwritten notebooks, seven of them from the 1940s through 1960s, and sixteen sets of typewritten notes.

Most of the entries in the book's first half were written in the late 1940s, when Frye was planning the sequel to his study of Blake. Most entries in the second half come from the middle 1970s, when he was working on *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976), and the late 1980s, when he was preparing lectures on Samuel Butler, Henry James, William Morris, and others. The earlier notebooks will probably have the most general appeal, for they show "the pullulating swarm of ideas" that Frye had at midlife as well as his attraction to pattern and his fear of "false symmetry" (131). He had been keeping notebooks since the 1930s, but discarded the early ones with the drafts of *Fearful Symmetry*, so the notebooks reproduced here provide the main evidence aside from personal letters of the "fun" he had writing that book and the personal "metamorphosis" that it gave him (11).

The early notebooks show that Frye was oversimplifying when he said, in the preface to the *Anatomy*, that he went from Blake to Spenser only to find that the theory of allegory required a separate book. In the mid-1940s, he already thought of *Fearful Symmetry* as his Genesis and toyed with plans for a personal Torah. Exodus would treat the "analogical habit of mind" (49), Leviticus would discuss Spenser and Shakespeare as representatives of two literary traditions, Numbers would provide a history

of English literature, and Deuteronomy would be a restatement of Blake's teachings on the universal language of art as found in the English Bible. Dolzani explains that this was but one of Frye's many efforts to establish a pattern for his life's work. However, one might argue that Frye completed four-fifths of his Torah. Anagogy became a key concept of the *Anatomy*, especially in the second essay; Shakespeare was the subject of three books of lectures, while Spenser's spiritual heir Milton was the subject of another; and Frye's late books on the Bible and literature follow Blake's precept that the Bible provides the "great code" of art.

The later entries are more strictly concerned with prose romance. Frye hopes to "tie up" many of the loose ends he gathered over three decades (184) but realizes that romance is fabulous by nature and thus endlessly varied. He suspects that a study of romance such as he still projects will be more sprawling than his parallel study of the biblical tradition in literature. He coins the word *unifable* as a counterpart to Joseph Campbell's *monomyth*, associating the former with variations on a theme and the latter with epic and the "once-for-all encyclopedic shot" (193). He notes, in a suggestive moment, that the "section missing" from the *Anatomy* is on "the fabulous analogy of the Biblical myth," that is, on romance (283).

The introduction to this volume provides a long (thirty-seven-page) caveat for anyone who expects a series of glosses on the myth of romance outlined in the *Anatomy's* third essay. Dolzani warns that Frye treated romance as one myth within literature and modified his views over the decades as he rethought such dichotomies as classicism and romanticism, sacred and secular writing, myth and romance. Over the decades, Frye moved from a rather Spenglerian view of these subjects to a more expansive one. He acknowledged limitations in earlier treatments, notably in the *Anatomy's* placement of romance between comedy and tragedy. He came to think of romance as a form of storytelling reinvented in every literary period, and he worked out demonic and utopian aspects of it that took account of different stories that he read. In the introduction and the notes to this volume, Dolzani does a good job of accounting for Frye's ambitious reading program, especially in more recent fiction. The overall perspective is invaluable and makes one hope that he will produce a book-length treatment of Frye's literary vision.

The appendix to this volume lists four dozen romances on which Frye wrote commentaries in two of the later notebooks. These entries have been left out to save space, Dolzani explains, but they include remarks that some readers will find interesting—for example, a comment on the symbolic

writing of Hiawatha which Denham has quoted to good effect in *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World* (24).

Frye remarked that Butler's notebooks had "a lot of tripe in them" (337). He would have said the same of these notebooks, and, indeed, he wrote a few remarks to that effect (Denham, *Northrop Frye* 19). However, he had enough respect for literary scholarship that he could not subscribe to Butler's dream "Society for the Suppression of Erudite Research and the Decent Burial of the Past" (Butler 180). He did not want his remains destroyed, but could hardly have imagined the extent to which they would soon be made available. Some fellow critics like Harold Bloom and Terry Eagleton have already responded to less-than-tactful remarks. Others may wish the materials were arranged differently or tied more directly to the yet unedited volumes of Frye's previously published works. However, one can only be grateful for the confirmation, positive or negative, that the notebooks provide. There is positive confirmation, for example, that Frye never ceased to admire the criticism of his teacher Pelham Edgar, whose books included both Shelley and James. There is negative confirmation that he paid little attention to Canadian writers like Sarah Duncan as he planned his study of romance. With Dolzani's introduction and notes, these unexpurgated remarks will be interesting to anyone who wants to know what one of Canada's leading thinkers was *really* thinking.

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Works Cited

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Helen Vendler. *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickenson, Yeats*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006.
\$19.95 cloth; \$14.95 paper

What is thinking? To make the question thus explicit is to be at once beguiled by the charms and beset by the longeurs of Western European