

Moncton Did You Know?" Northrop Frye's Early Years

by

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In 1980 the poet, teacher, and translator George Johnston, a friend of Northrop Frye, penned an untitled poem in his beautiful calligraphic hand, inscribing it for "Norrie and Helen Frye." _ The poem begins:

MONCTON did you know
that your streets grew
Canada's famous
speed typist,

and that his childish fare
included Samuel Butler
at your Maritime
bosom,

and Bernard Shaw? Two such
master wits would teach
his wit
to bite.

In the remaining twenty-seven stanzas Johnston proceeds to review, for his imaginary audience of Monctonians, Frye's career, from its beginnings in his hometown and then in Toronto and on to his worldwide fame. But what does Johnston mean by saying that it is was Moncton's streets that "grew" Frye. What was it about his experience in his hometown that was decisive? Frye was relatively silent about Moncton in his published writings, but in his letters and notebooks and in several as yet unpublished typescripts he does reflect on his experience in Moncton, and these sources provide a somewhat fuller answer to Johnston's question than has been previously available.

Frye reports that he arrived in Moncton from Sherbrooke, Quebec, when he was seven or eight._ His uncertainty about his age at the time was apparently connected with the fact that the Fries moved to Moncton three times, the family's itinerant existence resulting from his father's difficulties in the hardware business. The family moved first into a boarding house in 1919; was sent back to Quebec when Frye's father Herm could not make ends meet; returned in 1920 to a house on North Street, where his mother enrolled the eight-year-old in grade four at Victoria School; moved south to Sussex the following summer and then returned to Moncton for the third time, this time settling into the upper floor of the duplex at 24 Pine Street._

We know a good deal about Frye's life in Moncton from 1920 to 1929, when he set off for Victoria College, much of the information coming from John Ayre's biography: his entering school for the first time in grade four; his view of his early education as a form of "penal servitude" presided over by teachers he described as "a rabble of screaming and strapping spinsters," _ strapping referring perhaps not just to matronly bulk but to a means of corporal punishment; his difficulties at Victoria School, which was just to the east across Cameron Street Park from the Pine Street duplex and then at the Edith Cavell school that had been built in 1920; the economic and social struggles of his family; his reading (particularly Hurlbut's Story of the Bible, that well-traveled old chestnut that is still in print, the novels of Scott and Dickens and Thackeray; classics from his mother's library); the beginning of his desire to write a sequence of eight concerti and then eight novels, a very important moment in Frye's life to which we will return; his joining a boys' club for those not interested in sports and his rather half-hearted interest in the Boy Scouts; his contempt for fundamentalist preachers at Wesley Memorial Church; his experiences at Aberdeen High; the beginnings of his interest in music; and his first romantic attraction, Evelyn Rogers. Rather than repeating the interesting details about these early years supplied in Ayre's readily available account, let me begin with three anecdotes from the archival manuscripts, some of which have been recently published, as a way of indicating the kinds of autobiographical detail they contain.

The first begins with a two-page set of terse notes that Frye apparently used for an autobiographical talk. One cryptic note reads, "After high school, business college and writs of *capias*. Arrest for debt: the Steeves story." The reference to "business college" is clear enough: after graduating from Aberdeen High, Frye went off to Success Business College, where he learned shorthand and typing, his typing proficiency having been sufficiently advanced for him to stop halfway through his course to compete in the Canadian Typing Championships at Massey Hall in Toronto. The punch line of this story is well-known: the sixteen-year-old returned to Moncton with a second-place award and was then invited to Toronto to compete as a Provincial Champion in the world's championship. But what about the references to "*capias*" and "the Steeves story"? The answer comes in one of Frye's letters to his girlfriend, Helen Kemp, from June 1932. "Moncton," he writes,

is at present shrieking with laughter over the predicament of one of its least popular citizens, a man by the name of Steeves. The name is common enough here, but this worthy is notorious as a tight-fisted and grasping old miser. A man owed him some money, left town, died, and was shipped back here to be buried. Now if a debt is of long standing, the debtor may be arrested under a writ called *capias*, which is addressed to any constable in the county and says-I have typed dozens of them-"You are required to take the body of So-and-so and him safely keep," etc. This says nothing about whether the body is dead or alive, so Steeves ordered the corpse seized at the station, and then informed the widow triumphantly that she would have to pay the bill before the late lamented's remains would be forthcoming. Whereupon the widow developed an unexpectedly stubborn streak and told him he was welcome to them. So now Steeves doesn't know what to do, but will obviously have to bury the creature in the end at his own expense. The coffin is in Steeves' warehouse, and veracious witnesses assert that they have distinctly heard the corpse laughing inside it, though I have not had time to check up on this as yet.

The second anecdote is recorded in a letter to Kemp in August 1936. Frye has taken the train back to Moncton for a brief visit before he was to sail for a year's study at Oxford. On the trip he runs into a trainman named Cormier, who turns out to be a neighbor and friend of his father. Frye writes to Kemp that Cormier

probably has the best library in Moncton, and has been collecting and reading standard works on anthropology, comparative religion and evolutionary theory for twenty years. He undoubtedly knows far more about comparative religion than anyone in Emmanuel College. Very dogmatic and violently anti clerical, full of Haeckel and Frazer type of materialism and rationalism. Somewhat narrowed by a profound conviction that all theological writers are either fools or deliberate liars, and quite surprised that I had read or even heard of any of the books he had read. The Acadian Frenchman is naturally a liberal freethinker on good terms with the English, in contrast to the Quebec habitant, who is nationalist and obscurantist. The latter are gaining ascendancy through their superior spawning faculties, and are trying to foment racial quarrels here. Cormier is part of the vanguard of an agnostic tendency which I think will absorb eventually most of the urban population of French Canada. He made me feel that he, a mere trainman, should while I, who had been to University Fill up the blanks with something pious and patronizing.

Frye was clearly attracted to the freethinking Robert J. Cormier, even though Cormier treated the young student with some condescension.

But all Monctonians were not such liberal freethinkers as Cormier, as we see in this third anecdote, which Frye records in his 1942 diary:

I often wonder about intuitive racial-stereotype thinking: a lot of it's balls. For instance, there's a big good-natured German in Moncton called Lichtenberg who had been a peaceful, thrifty, industrious contractor there for thirty years. For two wars the local Gestapo have cut their teeth on him: when the news is bad or they get tired of reading spy stories they'd go up and practise on him. Recently the Gestapo combed his whole house over, in response to some silly anonymous "tip," & one of them found two large knobs in a dark closet. "Aha!" he said, stepped into the closet & gave one a twist, thinking of course it was a private transmitter set. It was an extra shower he'd installed. Incidentally, he's a naturalized Canadian citizen, but married before that, so his wife, who belongs to one of the oldest Maritime families, is an enemy alien. Well, Dad's friendship for Lichtenberg has come in for much unfavorable comment in that stinking little kraal Moncton, & the stinkers point out gleefully that "Frye" is really a German name, & that I look just like a German. It's a beautiful theory, only it just happens to be wrong.

Monctonians of the time would doubtless not have been too pleased with the reference to their town as a "stinking little kraal" or with the other uncomplimentary things that Frye occasionally says about his hometown, which, when he was growing up there in the 1920s, was busily recovering from the war. When he was eight, the T. Eaton Company had launched its mail order business, hiring 752 new employees, and 8000 visitors, close to half the population of the town at the time, had come to see the new building when it opened. Postwar expansion was everywhere: new businesses were springing up; older ones expanded; new schools were built (King George School in addition to Edith Cavell); the Rotary Club was organized in 1920 and other such clubs followed; new churches opened their doors; \$80,000 was raised to renovate the YMCA; sports teams were rejuvenated and their accommodations rebuilt following the war. CNRA, the "Voice of the Maritimes," with its 500 watts began broadcasting its Canadian-content programs. But young Northrop Frye, whose childhood was not an altogether happy one, seemed to be unaware or unimpressed with all this activity during the early to mid-1920s, and even in the 1930s.

In one of his very early letters to Helen Kemp he notes that his sister Vera didn't like to come back home to Moncton and neither did he. "One of my professors told me last year," he writes, "that although he liked Handel he could never endure the Messiah and similarly he could never read the Bible because he had been brought up on both compulsorily and grew to dislike them. That's the way I feel about Moncton. Why? Well, everyone who ever amounts to anything has to get out of his system an enormous heap of painfully silly trash in his adolescence." But Frye adds, very interestingly, that Moncton was in any event for him, in contrast to Vera, what he calls a "focal point." It's this focal point I want to lead up to, for I am convinced that Frye's experience in this place during his early years did bring into focus a number of key features in his imaginative and critical life. Although Moncton was a place that Frye wanted to escape from, as with most things in life, there is always an "on the other hand," and Frye's experience there during a formative decade—from about 1920 to the time he went off to college in 1929—was in many ways crucial to what "grew" him, in George Johnston's phrase.

After his third year at Victoria College (he is 19 at the time), Frye returns to Moncton for the summer, taking the two-day journey by way of Montreal. He is able to land a job at the public library, which had opened in 1927 at the foot of Archibald Street. Frye is generally disgruntled about being back home: he has been taken away from the Toronto he'd grown to like, from his classmates, and of course from Helen Kemp. But his discontent is mitigated somewhat by his being close to the books he loved. In the library he discovers Louis Untermeyer's *American Poetry since 1900*, a book that was to introduce him to Wallace Stevens, who turned out to be one of Frye's great literary heroes. This book was perhaps as important as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Song and Lyrics*, which was in the grade eleven curriculum at Aberdeen High and which introduced Frye to English poetry. He told John Ayre that encountering Milton in this anthology was an important cause in his becoming an English teacher. But Frye also discovers in the Moncton library a book of dramatic doggerel called *Judith of Tyre* by Margaret M. Seavey, who inscribes the book, saying "Because Moncton is my birthplace I am presenting this book to its library." The book has since disappeared from the library and Margaret Seavey seems to have disappeared into the dustbin of history. The latter is no doubt regrettable but the former is not, for *Judith of Tyre* surely qualifies as one of the worst-written plays of all times. And Frye spares no effort in lampooning it, telling Kemp that the best line in the play is one of the stage directions.

Still, he says in another letter, "I rather like working in this library. It's such an interesting psychological study. The number of ways a taxpayer can think up to bully me are practically infinite. There's one charming old gentleman who comes in about three times a week, tosses disgustedly a couple of detective stories in front of me and says: "Trash, absolute trash! Got any more of that author?" Then he explains shamefacedly that he uses them as soporifics. Then there are French youngsters who suddenly become most hopelessly ignorant of English whenever they have a fine due on their books." Frye himself, incidentally, became a voracious devourer of detective novels.

On the whole, the summer of 1932 in Moncton is hardly a pleasant experience. Frye's father is unemployed, and his effort to get a building supply agency is doomed to failure because, as Frye writes, "not a building has gone into the air since the well-known depression entered into the Maritime stream of consciousness." He is distressed to learn that his family has acquired a radio: radios were always for Frye little boxes that produced nothing but noise, and "every kid in Moncton had a ukulele and built a crystal set." He is even more distressed by what he encountered at the Wesley Memorial Church. The original church had been built in 1891, its entrance surmounted by a domed belfry. J.E. Belliveau credits Frye's mother with having said that the dome was painted blue and made the structure look "like that of an extreme pentecostal sect." Frye attended this church, as well as the one that replaced it in 1926. At the cornerstone ceremony in August of 1927 each of the

young people of the Sunday School who had given money for the building fund laid a brick in the wall, and among these were Northrop Frye (he had just turned fifteen), his girl-friend Evelyn Rogers, and his school chum Fred Kirby. One of the more amusing accounts of his Sabbath experiences is in a letter to Kemp from July 1932. Frye, who had had his twenty-third birthday just three days before, records this little Sunday episode:

Mother has just dragged me out to church. Our church has gone in with a Baptist one for the summer and it's their choir and organist. The anguish I suffered listening to the latter is not easy to imagine. Four trebles, three altos, three tenors and eight basses. None of them mattered except a very fat and red-faced soprano who was about half the choir. The organist was nothing. They plunged into a fairly difficult . . . setting of "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" and when they finished-or at least when they stopped-I was leaving grooves in the pew. I think it a well-grounded belief that anyone who goes to heaven will have to become a musician but if that mob ever gets past the pearly gates they will have to join the awkward squad for sure. The minister was apparently not a Baptist, as he made a reference to his University career. He told us that the Bible was historically quite accurate. I forget his text-so did he, for that matter.

The bibliolatriy of Canadian Methodism was something Frye resisted all his life, as he resisted any system that demanded he deduce everything from some verbal system-whether it be the Bible or Catholic dogma or the Marxian gospel or the thoughts of Chairman Mao. As for the "bundle of threats, contradictions and muddled arguments" of religious fundamentalism, Frye reports that they "just fell off," and this episode, which happened as Frye was walking along St. George Street to Aberdeen High School, relieved him of a great "burden of anxiety."

As for his education, Frye told David Cayley that "high school in Moncton was so primitive in the twenties." It was a kind of demonic parody of what he found once he arrived in Toronto, where the students "all had a very much better education." He remarks how curiously out-of-date his history and geography books were, saying that he learned more geography from his stamp collection. The books for health class were "nothing but propoganda against alcohol and tobacco." "Why," Frye asks, "did they insist on school attendance when they care so little about what [the students] were taught." The system assumed, he adds, that students naturally didn't want to go to school, so the goal then became simply "to keep the little buggers off the streets." Frye is speaking about elementary school here. He had a somewhat higher opinion of Aberdeen High, and he recalls that he was "deeply touched by my English teacher saving my compositions." Although Frye had a few friends, he was something of a loner. Twenty-five years ago, J.E. Belliveau, in an article in the Atlantic Advocate, recalls this picture of Frye walking along St. George Street on his way to Aberdeen High: "A tall, thin youth, his wildly blowing reddish hair today would go unnoticed but in the late 1920s it seemed the essence of artistic eccentricity. He never seemed to move at anything but a half-running pace. His books stacked under an arm, obviously concentrating, he seemed to look neither to right nor left, just straight ahead and determined."

During the summer of 1932 Frye feels imprisoned by the provincialism of Moncton, which, he writes to Kemp at one point is "as dead as the reconstruction of Stonehenge." He had already experienced the richness of life in Toronto (Frye would always be a city person), and he says to Kemp that he would "rather starve in Toronto than feed in luxury" in Moncton. He clearly envies her being in Toronto, where she is caught up in a swirl of activity, rubbing elbows with the artists, architects, and musicians of Toronto. But there were several saving graces: his books, and to a lesser extent, his ex-girlfriend, whom he saw on several occasions, not so much because he was interested in her but because he wanted Kemp to know that there were others, or at least had been, and because he liked to talk to Evelyn Rogers' socialist and unionist father. And Frye had his music. His piano teacher, Dr. George Ross who had come from Scotland in 1910, was the organist at the Saint John's Presbyterian Church in Moncton. Ross, who had been a student of Sir Hubert Parry, had a great influence on Frye, who later told Ian Alexander on the CBC's "Music in My Life" series that what gave him complete confidence in Ross "was that he was never pushing his students to do dramatic things which would redound to his credit. All he cared about was the music and transmitting that to people." But in a late notebook, when in his early seventies he worries about his inability to get back to practicing the piano, he makes this confession: "My adolescent interest in Classical music (I could never hear anything in popular music but an unpleasant noise) was obsessive, a reaction against Monctonian, parental, & school environments." He also confesses that if he'd learned the Palmer method of writing, as his Moncton schoolteachers tried to get him to do, so that his writing emerged Zen-like from the arm rather than the fingers, he might have developed into a poet or novelist, or even an artist.

There were moments in Frye's Moncton childhood that would have been evidence enough to predict his prophetic genius. In one of his notebooks he records this fantasy: "In my childhood I dreamed of becoming a great astronomer & discovering a new planet beyond Neptune that I was going to call Pluto." Frye calls this a "curious form of e.s.p. that he possesses," and with good reason, as Pluto wasn't actually discovered and so named until a decade later. In an earlier notebook he records the kinds of things that were swirling through his young, fertile brain: "At school I was taught that substances keeping form & volume were solids, those keeping volume but not form liquids, & those keeping neither gas. Even then I could see that there ought to be a fourth class keeping form but not volume. And there is a tradition, though admittedly a very speculative one, which says that there is a fourth class of this kind, & the one that includes all organisms or living beings. Also, that just as solids, liquids & gases have a symbolic connexion with, respectively, earth, water & air, so organisms, especially warm-blooded animals, are units of imprisoned fire."

Frye returned to Moncton during the summer of 1933 and then again briefly in August 1936, before he was to leave for his first year at Oxford. The second visit produced little joy or comfort. He is distressed that it will be a whole year before he will again see Helen Kemp. He discovers that his mother, now sixty-five, has aged considerably beyond her years:

Mother is an old woman now, quite old, and looks rather ghastly with her large white face, the lines of her mouth arching down to her chin, her close cropped grey white hair and a growth on the side of her nose. . . . Mother's life up to Howard's death [Howard was Frye's older brother who had been killed in WWI] becomes more real to her all the time, and the rest of her life less real. I'm not quite real to her now, except as a kind of after image of Howard. She read my Delius article and said she didn't know anything about that man Delirious.

In one of his late notebooks Frye writes, "[M]y mother's feeling that she had only one son and that I was a second-rate substitute for him (God provided the substitute, but God can be a pretty blundering fool in evangelical minds) may have affected me in some ways. Fortunately I was always too indolent & selfish to make silly efforts about it, trying to 'prove' myself and the like."

Kemp wants to visit before Frye leaves for England, but he dissuades her, saying that "I couldn't offer you in my home the hospitality you and your parents offered me in Muskoka [that is, at the Kemps' summer cottage], and I am a little ashamed of that." In fact, Frye never offered to bring Kemp to Moncton, even to introduce her to his deaf mother. On the brighter side, he does remark that Moncton has spruced itself up, with its new post office and high school: Moncton High had opened its doors in September of 1935. "It's a good clean town, with all kinds of flowers and lawns and gardens and trees-quite healthy to look at." And he does get back to the library, reporting also that the piano is in good shape. Those things and two visits to his friend Cormier help him to endure the visit back home.

The essence of Frye has to do of course not with the external details of his life but with his mind and imagination, and I am convinced that it was his childhood and adolescence in Moncton that set Frye on the course he was to take. Let me return, then, to the idea of Moncton as a "focal point" and to George Johnston's notion-that the streets of Moncton really did "grow" what Frye ultimately became.

"At every stage [of life]," Frye writes in *Fearful Symmetry*, "from childhood to old age we are conscious, not only of a continuum of identity, but of a certain permanent form or character which makes us equally ourselves in all stages." Identity was an extraordinarily important principle for Frye. It's the principle that lies behind his radical conception of metaphor, and in the passage just quoted he is using the word in the ordinary sense of those things that define who we are as people, what he calls the "permanent form or character" of an individual-his or her personal identity. If what Frye says is true, then his life in Moncton was central in formulating what he became. In his second book, *Anatomy of Criticism*, he makes the same point: "A grown man feels identical with himself at the age of seven, although the two manifestations of this identity, the man and the boy, have very little in common as regards similarity or likeness. In form, matter, personality, time, and space, man and boy are quite unlike. This is the only type of image I can think of that illustrates the process of identifying two independent forms." In one of his notebooks, not yet published, he writes, "For all metaphor starts in the man-and-boy metaphor: the identity of the inner life." In other words, as Wordsworth says, "The child is father of the man."

"I have a feeling," Frye says in one of his notebooks from the 1960s, "that I cannot really get at the centre of a problem unless something in it goes back to childhood impressions." Or again, "All future goals really come out of the past, a mixture of historical & childhood myth." He reports that some of his "most vivid dream settings have been on Moncton streets. Streets are, of course, a labyrinth symbol, full of Eros: they recapture not past reality but my reality, reality for me." In a notebook from the late 1940s, Frye writes: "I have archetypal dream-memories which I can trace to childhood, or rather to one or two of the experiences of childhood that helped build it up. One involves gray city streets, a late afternoon, a rain, and sombre dark red houses with little gnome-like lights in them. . . . it conditions my reactions to city streets, late afternoons, rainy days, & T. S. Eliot's early poetry." So we can begin to understand what Frye means when he said in his Diaries that he was "convinced that impressions taken in the first few years of life recreate for the individual all the primary archetypes." Or as he told David Cayley, speaking of the non-fundamentalist aspects of his early religious experiences, "I think my religious background really did shape almost everything. It gave me the mythological framework I was brought up inside of, and I know from experience that once you're inside a mythological framework you can't break outside of it."

In an extraordinary notebook entry, Frye writes, "[The] line of descent [of the Second Essay of Anatomy of Criticism] begins when at the age of ten, on 340 High St. I started trying to imitate the style of that idiot Cramb's book on Germany and England." What exactly was at 340 High St. in 1922 is something of a mystery. It was not what one might expect, the Moncton Public Library. We do know that three years earlier 340 High St. was a vacant lot. So perhaps in 1922 Northrop Frye, age 10, was sitting in a vacant lot, his shock of yellow hair blowing in the wind, when he was trying to imitate the dithyrambic and passionate style of J.A. Cramb's study of German imperialism and the rivalry with Britain before the outbreak of World War I. Even for someone who had read all of Shaw by age fifteen, it is rather astonishing that a ten-year old was reading political history. But even more extraordinary is the fact that Frye can trace his rhetorical skill back to that single experience on High Street.

Frye acute shyness is well known. He worried a great deal about his introversion, and of course introversion can be debilitating. But, Frye writes in this connection, as a young person he kept silent because that was the only power a young person had, and that one of the constructive features of silence is that it creates a space around the self. If you talk, Frye says, you open the gate to the enemy. He also reports that from his early years he was "ferociously ambitious, with a Napoleonic complex in me that went through all the regular childish phases. I was a future great military commander simultaneously with knowing that I was the least military of males, & always would be." Frye's seems to have cultivated his introversion in later life in order to protect himself from intrusions, but his shy disposition was clearly rooted in his early life in Moncton.

Frye writes in one of his early notebooks, "When I was about seven I had a passion to live in a cave, which lasted a surprisingly long time, & if I'd been born in Tibet or early Christian Egypt I suppose I'd have become an anchorite. At eleven I had an equally strong passion for a private study, which I still have. This may be an underground current that breaks out in the form of my recurrent agoraphobia. A psychoanalyst would talk about wombs & fetuses & mothers & of course the everlasting Oedipus: I see it as the necessity for a Beulah or a place of intellectual seed." Or again, from a 1960s notebook:

Everybody has a fixation. Mine has to do with meander-and-descent patterns. For years in my childhood I wanted to dig a cave & be the head of a society in it-this was before I read Tom Sawyer. All the things in literature that haunt me most have to do with katabasis. The movie that hit me hardest as a child was the Lon Chaney Phantom of the Opera. My main points of reference in literature are such things as The Tempest, P. R. [Paradise Regained], Milton, the Ancient Mariner, Alice in Wonderland, the Waste Land-every damn one a meander-&katabasis work. I should have kept the only book Vera kept, The Sleeping King.

The Sleeping King is a fairy tale in which a blacksmith descends into a deep cavern to shoe the horses of a sleeping king and is rewarded by having the horseshoes he replaced and carried out of the cave turn into gold. The point is that these kinds of introverted and descent patterns began and were cultivated by Frye in childhood. They were what he calls "intellectual seed." The last chapters of the last book that Frye published in his lifetime, Words with Power, treat the archetypes of the cave and the furnace; so the reveries and fixations with katabasis, the descent downward, that began in Moncton is another illustration of George Johnston's claim that Moncton "grew" Frye. Had these things not "grown" inside the consciousness of young Northrop Frye, he

would have become an important critical presence, but he would not have become, I feel confident, the person who is arguably the most important Anglo-American literary and cultural critic of the last century.

In working through Frye's unpublished papers during the past decade I have discovered, among countless other things, that Frye's insights came to him quite early. A number of the papers Frye wrote as a student at Victoria and Emmanuel Colleges were fortunately preserved and have now been published. It is clear from these papers that in his early twenties Frye had already worked out a number of the fundamental principles of analysis and organization that would guide him through his more than thirty books. These principles are often schematic. Frye could not think without organizing his categories into some kind of spatial diagram, and in a number of his student essays we find embryonic forms of what would appear later, more fully developed, in *Anatomy of Criticism*.

As a child Frye says he had fantasies of being, first, a great man, and then a great composer. Later he wanted to be a great novelist. One of the more striking and complex of Frye's schemes for the last two, music and fiction, was born in 1921, when he was nine years old. He called it his "ogdoad," that is, an eight-part project, and it was really a road map for his life's work. At age nine Frye reports that he dreamed of writing eight concerti. At about the same time, after reading Scott's novels, he imagined writing a sequence of historical novels, and after he had made his way through Dickens and Thackeray, this modulated into "a sequence of eight definitive novels." When Frye was fourteen, each of these novels acquired a one-word descriptive name:

The first was to be called *Liberal*: it was to be a satire, a witty comedy of manners. The second I called *Tragicomedy*, and thought of it as a panoramic novel: I had always been fascinated by complicated plots & a great number of characters. The third, *Anticlimax*, I thought of as austere & forbidding; the fourth, *Mirage*, had no particular characteristics; the sixth, *Paradox*, was to be the most dizzily complicated of them all; the seventh, *Ignoramus*, the profoundest (because I was an agnostic by then and had started to read Hardy), and *Twilight*, subtitled a *Valedictory*, was to be my *Tempest*, the work of my old age._

These names, along with a symbolic code Frye had for each of the eight parts, remained with him over the years, appearing hundreds of times in his notebooks as a shorthand designation for his books, both those completed and those anticipated. In the 1940s the eight books were reduced to five-what Frye called his *Pentateuch*-but they expanded shortly after that into the eight once again. And when Frye had given up his dream of being a musician and a novelist, the ogdoad became the blueprint for eight works of criticism. As with all of his organizing patterns, the ogdoad was never a rigid outline, but it did correspond to the chief divisions in his conceptual universe over the years. What the eight names meant or whether the names themselves have any significance no one has yet figured out. But Frye did, thankfully, provide several keys to the ways that the ogdoad shaped his preoccupations over the years. In one of them he says,

Suddenly, & simultaneously with the final & complete conversion to criticism, my old adolescent dream of eight masterpieces rose up again and hit me finally and irresistibly. *Blake* became *Liberal*, the study of drama *Tragicomedy*, the philosophical book, now a study of prose fiction, became *Anticlimax*, *Numbers* became *Rencontre*, *Deuteronomy* *Mirage*, & three others took nebulous shape. For several years I dithered, doodled, dawdled, dreamed & dallied. It was silly to let an adolescent pipe-dream haunt me like that: on the other hand, it did correspond to some major divisions in my actual thinking. So I kept on with it. When I finished the *Blake*, it became zero instead of one, & its place was taken by a study of epic. In my notes the initial letters of the eight books were cut down to hieratic forms._

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the scheme continued to change, but Frye never abandoned it. *Moncton*, then, was the seat of the chief organizing scheme for Frye's entire writing career. And of course what is astonishing about the ogdoad is that the first incarnation, the eight concerti, came to Frye when he was nine years old. We can begin to understand, then, what Frye meant when he wrote to Kemp that *Moncton* was a "focal point" for him and to understand what George Johnston meant when he said that *Moncton's* streets "grew" Frye.

Notes

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_ The holograph manuscript is among the books in Northrop Frye's library, now housed at the Victoria University Library, Toronto. Johnston had been a student at Toronto during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and

- Frye had helped secure for him a teaching position at Carleton University, where Frye's classmate Monroe Beattie was chair of the English department. It proved to be a good fit, for Johnston remained at Carleton for his entire teaching career. The poem was later published under the title "A Celebration for Northrop Frye, May 28, 1980" in Johnston's *Endeared by Dark: The Collected Poems* (Erin, Ont.: Porcupine's Quill, 1990), 237-9.
- _ "Moncton, Mentors, and Memories," interview with Deanne Bogdan, in *A World in a Grain of Sand: Twenty-Two Interviews with Northrop Frye*, ed. Robert D. Denham (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 323.
 - _ John Ayre, *Northrop Frye: A Biography* (Toronto: Random House, 1989), 34-5.
 - _ *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture*, ed. James Polk (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 140.
 - _ Untitled autobiographical notes: typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, Victoria University Library, Toronto, 1991 accession, box 49, file 3.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1932-1939*, ed. Robert D. Denham, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 1:21.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 2:521-2.
 - _ My thanks to Ed Lemond, proprietor of The Owl's Attic Bookshop in Moncton, for identifying Cormier for me. Lemond bought Cormier's entire library in 1994.
 - _ *The Diaries of Northrop Frye, 1942-1955*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 42.
 - _ Moncton had a population of 17,488 in 1921. It grew to 20,689 by 1931. See Lloyd A. Machum, *A History of Moncton Town and City, 1885-1975* (Moncton, NB: City of Moncton, 1965), 379.
 - _ These details about Moncton after WWI come from *A History of Moncton Town and City, 1885-1975*, chaps. 22-4.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 1:29.
 - _ John Ayre, *Northrop Frye: A Biography*, 49.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 1:26. Seavey's play was published in New York by James T. White in 1924. In his letter to Kemp, Frye reproduces three pages of the dialogue.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 1:66-7.
 - _ *Ibid.*, 1:11.
 - _ Untitled autobiographical notes: typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 49, file 3.
 - _ http://www.wesleymemorialuc.ca/our_history.htm
 - _ *Ibid.*
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 1:42. The Baptist minister was no doubt the Rev. G.E. Whitehouse, who had come to the First Baptist Church in 1932 and left in 1933. See *A History of Moncton Town and City, 1885-1975*, 323.
 - _ See *The "Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 1964-1972*, ed. Michael Dolzani (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 75.
 - _ Untitled autobiographical notes: typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 49, file 3; cf. "Around twelve or thirteen I suddenly realized that I didn't believe in the dogmas of Biblical religion, and started breathing mental oxygen" (Unpublished typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 50, file 1).
 - _ John Ayre, *Northrop Frye: A Biography*, 44.
 - _ David Cayley, *Northrop Frye in Conversation* (Concord, Ont.: Anansi, 1992), 45.
 - _ These recollections about schooling are from the untitled autobiographical notes: typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 49, file 3.
 - _ John Edward Belliveau, "Three Scholars," *The Atlantic Advocate* 69, no. 2 (October 1978): 46.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 1:11.
 - _ *Ibid.*, 1:67
 - _ "Music in My Life," in *A World in a Grain of Sand*, 271.
 - _ *Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks, 1982-1990: Architecture of the Spiritual World*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 1:236.
 - _ *Ibid.*, 1:200.
 - _ *Northrop Frye's Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 68.
 - _ *Ibid.*, 208.
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 2:522.
 - _ *Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks*, 1:237
 - _ *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*, 2:528.
 - _ *Ibid.*, 2:530.
 - _ *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 247.
 - _ *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 124.
 - _ Notebook 18, par. 7.

- _ The "Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 141.
- _ Ibid., 182.
- _ Ibid., 166.
- _ Northrop Frye's Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts, 31.
- _ The Diaries of Northrop Frye, 61.
- _ Northrop Frye in Conversation, 39.
- _ The "Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 21.
- _ I am indebted to Ed Lemond for the information about 340 High St.
- _ The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1:98
- _ Untitled autobiographical notes: typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 49, file 3.
- _ Unpublished typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 50, file 1.
- _ Notebook 34, par. 45.
- _ The "Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 76.
- _ Unpublished typescript in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991 accession, box 50, file 1.
- _ Ibid.