

as continuity rather than a sharp break with the Ancien Régime. Superiors by mid eighteenth century had to manage finances carefully. The success or failure of a congregation often depended on the financial acumen of the Superior. These were the first businesswomen of France.

Rapley's dating of the decline of women's congregations to the first half of the eighteenth century has major historiographical implications. The decline of monasteries is usually dated in the last two decades before the Revolution as a result of rising secularism in society and in the monasteries themselves. But this interpretation has been based on statistics for males. Rapley's evidence shows that the decline in number of nuns was externally mandated and causally quite distinct from whatever affected monks.

One puzzle arises from this revised chronology. Given vibrancy in the seventeenth century and decline in the eighteenth, why was female literacy fourteen per cent in 1700 and twenty-nine per cent in 1789, as estimated by Furet and Ozouf? Perhaps some recourse to the many French *thèses* of Departments and regions would have given a clue. The author might have stressed that these nuns, unlike those of the nineteenth century, emphasized reading, to inculcate the message, over writing, which permits individual expression.

*A Social History of the Cloister* is simply an excellent book—sensitive, imaginative, and clearly written. It is a major contribution to the history of education, religion, and women.

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**Jean O'Grady and Goldwin French, eds. *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. lii, 684.**

"The aim of education" is "to make people maladjusted." It is "to destroy their notions that what society" does makes "sense, and that they ha[ve] only to conform to it to make sense of their own lives." For Northrop Frye, conformity and adjustment are to education what disease is to health. Frye has been subject to more caricature, misrepresentation, and belittlement than any

intellectual of his size, but he was a great radical thinker, as well as a great teacher, and his thought is overdue for reevaluation. The present volume is a step in this reevaluation, like the rest of the new *Collected Edition of the Works of Northrop Frye* (of which this is volume 7). It supersedes an earlier collection of Frye's essays, entitled *On Education* (1988), which was sanctioned by Frye himself and which was more compact and focused than this massive volume. For unexplained reasons, the editors deleted some essays from the earlier collection in assembling this extremely varied new collection, which includes everything from notes about administrators and the history of Victoria College, to letters to the editor, to convocation addresses, to profound reflections that must be read and re-read to be appreciated fully. Frye is a large and complex thinker, and this is a large and complicated collection; hence only some of the key themes can be touched on in a brief review.

Frye was a great teacher, and this alone would make him of interest to anybody concerned with teaching. His popularity was legend. His famous graduate course, "Principles of Literary Symbolism," was regularly held in a lecture theatre because of its huge enrollment, and his undergraduate classes were packed. He was one of those teachers who have a life-changing impact on students. In fact, Frye was consciously concerned with techniques of teaching and with education generally—unlike other major literary theorists, or academics as a group, for that matter. He abjured the notion that teaching is secondary to scholarship: he regarded his books as "teaching books," not as specialized scholarly studies. He explicitly preferred undergraduate teaching; he never cultivated a coterie of disciples. He had a passion for communicating; his writing is clear, straightforward, jargon-free, as well as witty, humorous, scathing, and full of aphoristic, quotable lines. He was interested in children's literature—a subject regarded with contempt by those who dominate English studies. He insisted that elementary school and secondary school teaching was the same sort of thing that professors at university were doing, and searched for ways to bring teachers at all levels together. He was a founding member of the curriculum studies group that the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education later swallowed up. Can one imagine Derrida or the stars of the New Historicism showing such interest or such commitment? Frye was unique in his interest in and commitment to education in the broadest sense of the word, and that is what this collection of essays is about.

Frye's influence was intense but brief, lasting from the late 1950s to the early '70s. Frye's ideas were never really accepted by the academy, and his thought was never a bandwagon, as deconstruction instantly became. Frye's period was that of the Civil Rights movement, of nationalist and non-aligned movements in the Third World; against a backdrop of rioting in the United States and the horror of the Vietnam war, the struggle for female emancipation became a real force, gay liberation began, and the New Left appeared. Social experimentation proliferated—hippies, communes, mescaline, love-ins and be-ins and happenings. The Quiet Revolution in Québec stimulated nationalism in English Canada, along with a surge of literary and cultural activity generally. Though Frye could have gone to Yale or Harvard or Oxbridge or anywhere, he stayed in Canada. Indeed he is a founder of Canadian literature as a discipline; his concepts ("where is here?" "garrison mentality") remain indispensable. Frye was something of a guru to students, however much he hated that role. His emphasis on the visionary William Blake, on imagination and desire, resonated with that turbulent, rebellious, and lively period.

It was a period that came to an abrupt end with the economic stagnation of the early 1970s, still with us, which ushered in poststructuralism/deconstruction. Its ideology of verbal self-contradiction, cognitive dissonance, and the evisceration of desire, all expressed in elegant intellectual dead ends, could hardly be more hostile to Frye's visionary poetics. Deconstruction has now been supplanted by the New Historicism (with ethnic/gender/class variants), which teaches that all texts are equal, equally reducible to the conflicts of the society that produced them. It seems to have won the theory wars, but something will replace it before long, if the history of criticism is any guide. As I have argued elsewhere, the contempt for Frye in the academy suggests not mere rejection but a kind of anxiety: there is something threatening about Frye's ideas; they have to be caricatured and dismissed rather than understood.

One reason for the anxious hostility to Frye is the defiantly utopian quality of his thought. Thus the ultimate purpose of education is to make us visualize what a better society would be like. Education is therefore a relentlessly subversive activity: it holds up what a better society would look like and lets us compare that model with what we now have. Without that image, we can never get something better than what we now have; indeed, we will regress to something worse. It enables us

to appreciate the good in what we have and work for something better. What the news and what history show us is a “dissolving phantasmagoria”: something that is real and yet unreal—real because it is actual, unreal because it makes so little human sense so much of the time. By contrast, the arts and sciences and all the attendant skills that emanate from them give us an idea of what a genuine society would be like: something that makes human sense, something that builds on genuine work done in the past and enables us to plan a future. Socially, the arts and sciences are reflected in the university, and Frye was obsessed with the university, its freedom, and its development, as itself a kind of model for society, freedom being inseparable from academic freedom, just as genuine justice is ultimately poetic justice. The utopian strain in Frye is abhorrent to the defeatism of contemporary ideology, just as it is abhorrent to corporations and the state, which see education as a subsidy to business, transferring training and research costs from business to society at large.

The teacher should be a transparent medium of the subject itself; hence the vice of teachers is putting oneself in place of the subject. When this happens, attention is focused on the teacher, not on what is being taught: education then dwindles into ego-inflation for the teacher. Frye rejected the “student-centred” model of education. Teacher and student are together because both are students of the subject. The difference is that the teacher is further along in studying the subject. Genuine learning means adapting to the subject, not adapting the subject to the student. It is an encounter with the new, the unfamiliar; in this encounter we realize that we can identify with the new and the unfamiliar and make it part of ourselves. Knowledge of the subject is what makes interest in the subject possible, and the only real magic that the teacher has is interest in the subject. If the teacher has that, it is possible to share it with students and to stimulate, in turn, their interest in it. If the interest is not there, the knowledge is not there, the learning is not there—and the students are not there either. They are mentally somewhere else. The only authority in the classroom, for Frye, is the authority of the subject itself, and it is that that draws together teacher and student and gives dignity to both. Such authority is genuine authority, because it is not based on coercion.

Rejecting the “student-centred” approach to teaching actually results in greater sensitivity to students. The teacher must be aware of the total learning experience of the student,

only a very small part of which happens in the classroom. Most of that total learning experience consists of “adjustment mythology,” the conditioning of mental reflexes in order to promote unthinking obedience, to encourage acceptance in society of passivity, cruelty, and irrationality, with the concomitant need for scapegoats and other outlets for social anxiety. Teaching is critical in the broadest sense; it not only builds up structures in the mind and opens up new vistas for students, it also breaks down unthinking reflexes and prejudice. Getting rid of false ideas is as important as learning new ones. Education is self-transformation, not the acquiring of units of information, important as that is. As Frye puts it:

All organisms except human beings adapt to their environment: humanity alone has elected to go on to transform it as well. Most people of course stop with adapting, and our educational bureaucracies are full of incompetents telling them that that is in fact the end of education, and encouraging them not to try to go beyond the role of docile and obedient citizens. Except that, in America particularly, docility and obedience to what is called the American way of life have to be called intellectual independence and thinking for oneself. But genuine students are seeking a better country. (pp. 612-13)

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**Claude Corbo. *La mémoire du cours classique. Les années aigres-douces des récits autobiographiques*. Montréal, Les Éditions Logiques, 2002. 446 p.**

Tout au cours de la lecture de ce volume, il faut garder à l'esprit son titre et les objectifs fixés par l'auteur, que lui-même nous rappelle d'ailleurs constamment. Avant de rédiger ses propres souvenirs du cours classique—ce qui constituera le second tome de l'ouvrage—, Claude Corbo a voulu faire «un examen de la mémoire du cours classique dans les écrits personnels, intimes ou autobiographiques québécois» (p. 16). À