FRIE ON LITERARY CRITICISM
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Frye maintains eclectic position as a critic as he refuses to commit himself to any exclusive or dogmatic theory of literature such as psycho-analytical, neo-Aristotelian, biographical, historical or any such kind. He could more aptly be described as a syncretist who has attempted to work out a rational synthesis of various principles and techniques in literary criticism. All the four essays comprising his poetics, The Anatomy of Criticism, i.e. Historical Criticism, Ethical Criticism, Archetypal Criticism and Rhetorical Criticism deal with criticism in its larger context and conform to his idea of scholarship which is defined by him in these words, "by criticism I mean the whole work of scholarship and taste concerned with literature which is a part of what is variously called liberal education, culture or the study of the humanities".

The most important reason for rating his work as outstanding is that no other contemporary critic has tried to rehabilitate literary criticism the way Frye did as an independent activity - an activity which may indeed be said to be related intimately to larger human perspectives. In this
context, we may refer to his introductory chapter, "Polemical Introduction", where he makes two important claims about criticism:

(a) his first claim relates to the autonomy and the scientific nature of criticism, and

(b) the second claim relates to the status of value judgements in critical theory.

As the 'Polemical Introduction' is a very important document for an understanding of Frye's theory of literature, it is proposed to discuss these two arguments here in some details.

FRYE ON CRITICAL AUTONOMY OR LITERARY AUTONOMY

Frye explains the idea of autonomy in these words:

The fact that literature consists of words, makes us confuse it with talking verbal disciplines. The literature reflect our confusion by cataloguing criticism as one of the subdivisions of literature. Criticism, rather, is to art what history is to action, and philosophy to wisdom: A verbal imitation of a human productive power which in itself does not speak. And just as there is nothing which the philosopher cannot consider philosophically and nothing which the historian cannot consider historically, so the critic should be able to construct and dwell in a conceptual universe of his own.

Frye makes four points here:

i) Criticism should not be confused or equated with any other verbal discipline;

ii) it should not be considered as a sub-division of literature;
iii) its relation to literature is what art is to history and philosophy to wisdom, and

iv) since its concepts are different from other disciplines, critics can regard it as an independent discipline in its own right.

Frye is more or less right in holding criticism as an independent and autonomous subject having its own conceptual apparatus. In The Critical Path, while discussing the relationship of criticism to other disciplines, he says: "I have always insisted that criticism cannot take presuppositions from elsewhere, which always means wrenching them out of their real context, and must work out its own". Frye voices a similar opinion in his 'Polemical Introduction' too when he raises these four points:

i) he cautions against the use of literature for the purpose of documenting some sociological, religious or psychological thesis and thus upholds the autonomy of literature;

ii) he expects the critic to retain his objectivity, and for this, he must derive his principles solely from his inductive survey of literary works;

iii) he considers such a survey as the first step the literary critic should take, and

iv) he identifies different 'neighbours' to criticism and expects the critic to enter into relation with them in any way that guarantees his own independence.

Thus, though in the Anatomy of Criticism he builds up his case for the independence of criticism from other disciplines and of literature from life, Frye also recognizes the fact that
criticism cannot enjoy total independence. He wants critics to realize that criticism has a variety of 'neighbours' too and hence expects a critic to enter into relationship with these neighbours. For Frye, criticism is a discipline which cannot be alienated totally from other disciplines. In other words, he wants to establish the identity of criticism as an autonomous discipline and at the same time holds that a critic should restrict his relationship with other disciplines to the extent of guaranteeing his own independence.

In this context Robert Denham echoes a similar belief when he observes:

His argument against deterministic approaches is much less absolute in the Critical Path than in the Anatomy. We find, for example, that he does not condemn all biographical approaches as deterministic — only those which assume that biography is the 'essential key' to poetic meaning. Moreover, only 'some' centrifugal methods are badly motivated and documentary approaches must be used by the centripetal critic with 'tact', not banned altogether.

In the 'Tentative Conclusion' to the Anatomy, however, Frye adopts a more pragmatic approach. He neither endorses the view that criticism is finally autonomous nor accepts the idea that literature is aesthetically self-contained. He speaks of the necessity for criticism becoming "more aware of the external relations of criticism as a whole with other disciplines", of the "revolutionary act of consciousness" involved in the response to literature, and of the obligation of criticism to
recover the social function of art. Stressing this point further, it is "hardly honest" he says, for criticism "to shrink altogether from these issues".

Frye's argument for critical independence is based on his observation that criticism has attached itself too much to the conceptual frameworks from other disciplines or ideologies. "Critical principles", he says, "cannot be taken over ready-made from theology, philosophy, politics, science, or any combination of these". Frye is against such an assimilation of criticism to another discipline such as politics or philosophy for in his view it will amount to giving "one the illusions of explaining one's subject while studying it". In addition to identifying the fallacy of determinisms Frye has identified many such determinisms in criticism such as Marxism, Freudianism, Existentialism, Jungianism, neo-classicism and so on, which use some framework external to literature as its conceptual base. This, he feels, is "partisan". While refuting the ideological or 'partisan' readings of literature he states:

To subordinate criticism to an externally derived critical attitude is to exaggerate the values in literature that can be related to the external source, whatever it is. It is all too easy to impose on literature an extra literary schematism a sort of religio-political color-filter, which makes some poets leap into prominence and others show up a dark and faulty. All that the disinterested critic can do with such a color-filter is to murmur politely that it shows things in a new light and is indeed a most stimulating contribution to criticism. Of course, such filtering critics usually imply, and often believe, that they are letting their literary experience speak of itself and
are holding their other attitudes in reserve, the coincidence between their critical valuation and their religious or political views being silently gratifying to them but not explicitly forced on the reader. Such independence of criticism from prejudice, however, does not invariably occur even with those who best understand criticism.

Frye's enunciation of critical terminology as 'partisan' or ideological should not make us overlook the fact that he himself liberally appropriates terminology from psychology such as projection, displacement, dream; from Biblical symbolism such as anagogic phase, and from cultural anthropology such as ritual, myth, archetype and so on. Frye however, has a justification for deriving insights and frameworks from disciplines like psychology and religion. In answer to his critics, Frye maintains that he is a "terminological buccaneer" meaning thereby that he has used words like 'archetype', 'displacement', 'mythos' or 'initiative' without retaining their original meaning in Jung's psycho-analysis, Freudian psychology, or for that matter in Aristotle or Coleridge respectively.

Though Frye maintains eclectic position by refusing to commit himself to any other known schools of criticism, he does not seem to impose his views on others. "I think that criticism as a whole is a systematic subject. But I do not think that the criticism of the future will be contained within the critical system, a tutti-frutti collection of the best ideas of the best critics... The genuine critic works out his own views of literature while realizing that there are also a great number
of other views, actual and possible, which are neither reconciliable nor irreconciliable with his own. They penetrate with him, and he with them, each a monad as full of windows as a Park Avenue building". By implication, he means, in criticism argument is functional and that disagreement cannot be ruled out. But disagreement, Frye maintains, should not be confused with rejection, for "disagreement is one thing, rejection is another, and critics have no more business rejecting each other than they have rejecting literature". Evidently, in Frye's view, every work of literature establishes its own value and it would be futile to try to reject or minimize the significance of these values. From the foregoing argument it is clear that in Frye's view literary values are not established by critical value judgements.

FRYE'S CRITIQUE OF VALUE JUDGMENTS

Frye's idea of value judgements is based upon a fundamental assumption that the two concepts namely knowledge and experience are two distinct identities and are separable from each other, and that literature is not directly concerned with value judgements. To make this argument about value judgement clear, we will try to explain first the notion of i) value judgement based upon knowledge; ii) value judgement based upon experience, and iii) value judgements proper.
So far as the values based upon knowledge are concerned, Frye maintains that they have no place in literature at all because such values are based firstly, upon a prior knowledge of the thing in question, and secondly, are subjective in nature. On the other hand, he maintains that values based upon experience are established by critical experience. This means, subjective, values are based upon sense experience whereas literary values belong to experience itself.

Frye thus makes a clear distinction between literary values or values based upon experience (literary values too belong to this kind), and value judgements. Such a distinction is warranted by the fact that "the humanistic and liberal pursuit of literature" is often associated by critics with value judgements.

Frye's idea of value judgements would be clear to us from the following passage where he makes four points:

i) Every value judgement contains within it an antecedent categorical judgement, as we obviously cannot tell, how good a thing is until we know what it is.

ii) Inadequate value-judgements nearly always owe their inadequacy to an insufficient knowledge of what the categories of literature are.

iii) Categorical judgements are based on a knowledge that can be learned and which should constantly increase; value judgements are based on a skill derived only from such knowledge as we already have.

iv) Therefore, knowledge or scholarship, has priority to
value judgements, constantly corrects their perspective, and always has the power of veto over them, whereas subordinating knowledge to value judgements leads to impossible pedantries.

This means, in Frye's view experience has a priority over value judgements, and hence, he is trying to establish the primacy of experience over the value judgements. In sum, Frye holds that since value judgements have their base in experience, experience is important than value judgements in appreciating or evaluating a given literary work.

Continuing his observations on value judgements, Frye identifies two kinds of value judgements: i) comparative and ii) positive. Further he divides the comparative value judgements into two kinds i) biographical evaluations which view a literary work as a product and ii) tropical evaluations which view the literary work as a possession. These two kinds of comparative judgements, he believes, are rhetorical in nature. In the case of the first kind, questions about the greatness of the author's personality become relevant. In the second case, the issues are related to the style and rhetoric of the writing. But in either case the basis of appeal of literary work for Frye is some "concealed, social, moral, intellectual analogy". These analogies lie behind attempts to make evaluative comparisons. Frye argues that efforts on the part of critics to promote or demote authors are to be understood as belonging to the history of taste rather than to criticism and concludes the argument.
saying that "Comparative estimates of value are most valid when silent ones, ... from critical practice, not expressed principles guiding its practice." Frye then turns to the second kind of judgements namely positive value judgements. These positive evaluations treat the goodness or genuineness of a poem and are derived in part from one's direct experience of literature rather than from an extraliterary perception. Frye regards them as somewhat less suspect than the comparative judgements, because he is of the view that positive values are born of "informed good taste", i.e. taste founded on both experience and knowledge. He however cautions the readers that positive value judgements cannot totally serve the purpose of criticism firstly because "it is superstitious to believe that the swift intuitive certainty of good taste is infallible. Good taste follows and is developed by the study of literature; its precision results from knowledge, but does not produce knowledge. Hence the accuracy of any critic's good taste is no guarantee that its inductive basis in literary experience is adequate".

Frye's caution is based upon his conviction that experience of literature can never be substituted by good taste. In his view, positive value judgements depend on good taste which in turn depends on disinterested knowledge. He holds that however important to criticism the experience of literature may be, artistic experience is invariably "like literature itself, unable to speak and therefore can never be captured by critical terminology".
Thus, Frye's explanation of three kinds of judgements, namely judgements based upon knowledge, experience and subjective value judgements has its roots in his assertion that literary or artistic experience is never translatable into experience or judgements of another sort. He therefore upholds the primacy of literary experience over all other activities related to literary criticism and literary evaluations.

**FRYE ON IMAGINATION**

Imagination alongwith understanding is a significant faculty of human mind. William Benton in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes imagination as "the power that synthesizes raw experience into concrete images, that apprehends order and form and that fuses contrary elements of feeling, vision, and thought with a unified whole".

Frye attaches a great significance to the notion of imagination in his literary criticism. Frye's notion of a work of art is rooted in his view of imagination and is based largely on the idea of imagination held by the Romantics. It would be pertinent therefore to discuss first the Romantic view of imagination.

Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge believed that making a poem was not a part of the rational process. They tried to ascribe the source of creativity to something other than reason. Coleridge, for example, came to identify the creative power with
the faculty of imagination, the highest faculty in man. In *Biographia Literaria* he expresses his idea of imagination in these words:

The Imagination, then, I consider as primary or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and Prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate, or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as 23 objects) are essentially fixed and dead".

Coleridge here identifies two kinds of imagination:

i) the primary imagination which he believes aids the perceptive faculty of man and helps him perceive things with his senses and ii) the secondary imagination by which man perceives nature and its manifestations at large. For example, bringing sensations into a unity or giving them a form would constitute in Coleridge's view an act of primary imagination, whereas recreation or reproduction of an image and the creative acts in general are held by Coleridge as works of secondary imagination.

Like the Romantics, Frye too equates the faculty of
imagination with the creative force in mind. However, Frye's notion of imagination distinguishes itself from the Romantic view on the point of the structuring power of imagination. Frye makes his idea of imagination clear in the following words:

Imagination creates reality, it creates culture out of nature, it also produces literary language. The most important thing it creates is not the surface texture of literature but its deeper structures and designs ... What it has produced is everything that we call nature and civilization. It is the power of transforming a sub-human physical world into a world with a human shape and meaning.

Imagination, thus, has much greater significance in Frye. He regards imagination as a force that transforms perceptions of nature into cultural products, and thus views imagination as a constitutive of reality. Further, imagination is held responsible for creating deeper structures and designs in mind and has the capacity to transform the sub-human physical world into a human world having concrete shape and meaning. Frye thus accords a much more significant role to imagination in his art-criticism.

In the Anatomy, Frye makes a distinction between the scientific mode which perceives an objective nature and the poetic mode which perceives transformed world of nature available to human mind. In Fearful Symmetry, he speaks of three basic modes of perceiving the world: i) the world of memory which is responsible for egocentric perception of the unreal world, reflection and abstract ideas; ii) the world of sight, i.e. the ordinary perception of the world we live in, and iii) the world.
of vision, i.e. the imaginative perception of the world we desire and want to create.

In the Anatomy, Frye's approach to the understanding of a work of art is binary in nature as he makes, like the Romantics, a clear distinction between the scientific and the poetic perceptions. In the Fearful Symmetry Frye goes a step further by adopting a tripartite approach for the understanding of the human mind, namely the world of memory, the world of sight and the world of vision. This multivalent approach evolved by Frye for the understanding of the working of the human mind and for perceiving the world of art makes his position on imagination more comprehensive and complex in nature.

In the same book Frye also maintains that imagination is a perceptive faculty which is open and common to all men. Stressing the openness and the universality of the human imagination Frye argues,

What makes the poet worth studying at all is his ability to communicate beyond his own contest in time and space... It is here that Blake comes in with his doctrine that "all has originally one language, and one religion". If we follow his own method, and interpret this in imaginative instead of historical terms, we have the doctrine that all symbolism in all art and all religion is mutually intelligible among all men, and that there is such a thing as an iconography of the imagination.

Frye seems to be agreeing with William Benton on the
universal character of imagination. At this level he contemplates mutual intelligibility, symbolism, and iconography having a moral communicability.

Continuing the argument further, Frye observes,

Neither the study of ritual nor of mythopoeic dreams takes us above a subconscious mental level, nor does such a study, except in rare cases, attempt to suggest anything more than a subconscious unity among men. But if we can find such impressive archetypal forms emerging from sleeping or savage minds, it is surely possible that they would emerge more clearly from the concentrated visions of genius... A comparative study of dreams and rituals can lead us only to a vague and intuitive sense of the unity of the human mind; a comparative study of works of art should demonstrate it beyond conjecture.

The universality of the human mind and the subconscious mind aid us in the understanding of the 'subconscious unity' shared by all men. A comparative study of works of art as the products of imagination can just give us a more certain knowledge of the universal pattern common to human minds.

Explaining further the role of imagination in literature Frye observes,

Literature, we say, neither reflects nor escapes from ordinary life: what it does reflect is the world as human imagination conceives it, in mythical, romance, heroic, and ironic as well as realistic and fantastic terms. This world is the universe in human form, stretching from the complete fulfilment of human desire to what human desire utterly
repudiates, the quo tendas (i.e. anagogic, "what you should be going") vision of reality that elsewhere I have called, for reasons rooted in my study of Blake, apocalyptic... some religions assume that such a world exists, though only for gods, other religions, including those closer to us, identify it with a world man enters at death, the extremes of desire becoming its heavens and hells; revolutionary philosophies associate it with what man is to gain in the future; mystics call it the world of total or cosmic consciousness. A poet may accept any of these identifications without damage to his poetry; but for the literary critic, this larger world is the world man exists and participates in through his imagination. It is the world in which our imaginations move and have their being while we are also living in the "real" world, where our imaginations find the ideals that they try to pass on to belief and action, where they find the vision which is the source of both the dignity and the joy of life.

Desire, in Frye's criticism and also in contemporary theory, has a wider significance and is seen as the motivating force for the thoughts, human actions and so on. It is a kind of metaphysical entity. In Frye's view, imagination helps us understand this mythical category. The different perceptions of imaginative literature become possible or apprehensible for us on account of the faculty of imagination.

Imagination, thus, has wider significance in Frye's scheme of things, for i) he equates imagination with the creative force in mind ii) he regards imagination as a force that transforms perceptions of nature into cultural products and view it as a constitutive of reality and iii) he holds imagination responsible for creating deeper structures and designs in mind,
with capacity to transform the sub-human physical world into a human world having concrete shape and meaning. No wonder, therefore, that imagination plays a significant role in Frye's scheme of art-criticism.

**FRYE ON CRITICISM AS SCIENCE**

After establishing that criticism is not a sub-division of literature or any other discipline, Frye expresses his view that criticism is a science and a discipline deserving its own theoretical structure. Frye's view of criticism as science has two different meanings.

In the first sense, Frye begins his argument by proposing "an examination of literature in terms of a conceptual framework derivable from an inductive survey of the literary field". He suggests that such an examination can and should be scientific.

By 'scientific' Frye means that a critical inquiry should be systematic, inductive, and causal as opposed to random and intuitive; he wants criticism to be self-contained rather than dependent upon the principles of other disciplines and that it should attempt a coherent and progressive consolidation in organizing its materials. He thus wants critical inquiry to be based on rational and systematic analysis and on some general system of ideas.

While making a claim that criticism is a science, Frye points out that considered historically criticism still exists in
a state of naive induction whereas other disciplines such as physics, history, biology and astronomy have moved beyond primitivism and have acquired the status of pure science. He explains that this transition from naive induction to a status of pure science is accomplished when a discipline rather than conceiving the data of immediate experience as its explanatory and structural principles, conceives the data themselves as the phenomena to be explained. Physics, for example, "began by taking the immediate sensations of experience, classified as hot, cold, moist, and dry as fundamental principles. Eventually physics turned inside out and discovered that its real function was rather to explain what heat and moisture were". So also, he believes that the study of history has passed through a similar revolution. Frye argues by analogy that criticism is currently in a state of naive induction because its practitioners insist on treating every literary work as a datum which needs to pass beyond the primitive state to a scientific one. He concludes his argument saying that this can be accomplished only when criticism seeks to explain literary works in terms of conceptual framework which is independent from the datum itself.

Expressing his awareness that criticism has not yet attained the scientific rigour he explains that it needs "to keep to a new ground from which it can discover what the organizing or containing forms of its conceptual framework are. Criticism seems to be badly in need of co-ordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology will
see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole”.

Frye’s claim regarding literary criticism as a science and his search for a co-ordinating principle of literature are based on his belief that literature is an order of words. He states that

We have to adopt the hypothesis, then, that just as there is an order of nature behind the natural sciences, so literature is not a piled aggregate of works, but an order of words. A belief in an order of nature, however, is an inference from the intelligibility of the natural sciences, and if the natural sciences ever completely demonstrated the order of nature they would presumably exhaust their subject. Similarly criticism, if a science, must be totally intelligible but literature, as the order of words which makes the science possible, is, so far as we know, an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries, and would be even if new works of literature ceased to be written.

This means, in Frye’s view literature in its totality is an order of words and this order is analogous to the order of nature which forms the basis for the understanding of natural sciences. Similarly, he feels, the ‘order of words’ which constitute the totality of literature ought to explain the ‘science of criticism’. But whereas our belief in the order of nature is based upon hypothetical inferences from the natural sciences, such limitations would not apply to the study of literature because literature, unlike natural sciences, is creative and evolutionary in character besides being ‘an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries’. Frye’s argument here seems to be quite convincing.
Commenting on Frye's views of literature Marshall Grossman states,

Frye wants to make criticism a science, and a descriptive taxonomy is not sufficient to this call. Frye's science seeks also to establish causes, and man surely stands in a causal relationship to literature. Frye's interest in literature as a product is classificatory... It views literature synchronically, seeking to relate work to work, genre to genre, according to criteria internal to the literary system. But his interest in literature as production, as the work of human desire, produces a shadowy system that cannot be integrated into the tabular classification because its essentially temporal development projects a different sort of discourse...

Thus, an overview of discussion on Frye's views on literary criticism, value-judgements, imagination and critical autonomy would reveal that Frye was concerned in giving literary criticism the scientific rigour enjoyed by disciplines like mathematics, physics and other pure sciences. By raising criticism to the level of pure sciences Frye expected to introduce some orderliness in the field of literary criticism. To achieve this, he thought a) a check on value-judgements in evaluating a work was imperative; b) elimination of value-judgements from the sphere of criticism would contain unscholarly, unnecessary and stray opinions and thus the practitioners of literary criticism would become more objective in their approach; e) a restraint on free opinions and debates would check violation of established and accepted literary norms and practices and lastly d) a disciplined approach of the kind he had envisaged...
would influence and give a proper orientation to the faculty of imagination in one's mind.

Though Frye's propositions may appeal to us in principle, they do not seem to be sound in practice. For instance, total elimination of value-judgements from the domain of criticism would create problems of evaluation. Secondly, Frye has not given an alternative method for evaluating a work of art. As regards his claim on the critical autonomy, Frye himself has admitted that total autonomy is not possible. Frye is aware of the fact that literary criticism or for that matter discipline of whatsoever nature cannot be totally segregated from the others or studied in isolation. Hence, he conceded that literary criticism should borrow form other disciplines only to a limited extent, in other words, it should restrict its relationships with other disciplines to the extent of ensuring its own independence.

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Chapter Notes


2. Ibid. p. 12.

4. Ibid. p. 18.
6. Ibid. p. 344.
7. Ibid. p. 344.
8. Ibid. p. 7.
10. Ibid. p. 6.
11. Ibid. p. 11.
12. Ibid. p. 362.
15. Ibid. p. 29.
18. Ibid. p. 25.
19. Ibid. p. 27.
20. Ibid. p. 27.
21. Ibid. p. 27.


29. Ibid. p. 15.

30. Ibid. p. 16.

31. Ibid. p. 17.