

New Englander who wore tweeds and flannels instead of overalls. These, coupled with vivid images and cadenced phrases, leave me with a portion of Poplarhaven's richness, which Geary sums up in "Harvest Home":

"Nothing is nicer," Grandpa used to say, than a full barn and a full granary." . . . Abundance is what remained when the threshing was done and the mellow Utah autumn slid gradually into winter . . . evidence that we reap as we have sown. And abundance in the memory which lasts long after the barn and granary are empty hulks, for sometimes

we also reap where others have sown (p. 109).

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The Code Revealed

The Great Code: The Bible and Literature by Northrop Frye (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), xxiii+261 pp., \$14.95.

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NORTHROP FRYE, perhaps North America's pre-eminent literary critic, is not a name ordinarily associated with scriptural exegesis. Yet his name virtually assures that this volume will be read and analyzed by those in literary fields, no matter what one may think about the topic or approach. Frye describes the Bible similarly: "Whatever we may think about it . . . it insistently raises the question: Why does this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit there inscrutably in the middle of our cultural heritage like the 'great Boyg' or sphinx in *Peer Gynt*, frustrating all our efforts to walk around it?" (pp. xviii-xix)

To appreciate fully what Frye has given us, readers should keep the book's subtitle in mind. This is clearly not a volume that deals with the Bible as literature. In *The Great Code*, readers will not encounter discussions of the similarities between biblical stories and later works of

fiction and poetry. Instead, they will be treated to an analysis of how the Bible serves as the repository of much of the Western world's cultural mythology.

Frye himself describes *The Great Code* as neither a work of biblical scholarship nor of theology, but rather as "a study of the Bible from the point of view of a literary critic" (p. xi). His original intention seems to have been to examine some of the ways in which the Bible has influenced its literary readership through the ages. Instead, he has surpassed that aim and has written an enlightening discussion of the structure of the Bible's narrative and imagery and of the linguistic conventions that make quite different demands on a reader of the Bible than are made on a reader of current fiction.

The book is divided into two parts, entitled "The Order of Words" and "The Order of Types." Part one contains chapters dealing with language, myth, metaphor, and typology; in part two, Frye presents the same four topics in the opposite order. This chiasmic structure makes it immediately apparent that he intends to demonstrate an interrelatedness and symmetry to all the topics he will be covering. Frye is a great believer in cycles, loops, reflection, and doubling back. The very struc-

ture of his book mirrors his major theme: that the biblical narrative is composed of opposites that have similar functions within their own frameworks.

Frye's introduction to typology could serve as an introduction to this book as well if one were to substitute "Part One" and "Part Two" for "Old Testament" and "New Testament":

Everything that happens in the Old Testament is a "type" or adumbration of something that happens in the New Testament, and the whole subject is therefore called typology, though it is typology in a special sense. . . . What happens in the New Testament constitutes an "antitype," a realized form, of something foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

This typological way of reading the Bible is indicated too often and explicitly in the New Testament itself for us to be in any doubt that this is the "right" way of reading it — "right" in the only sense that criticism can recognize, as the way that conforms to the intentionality of the book itself and to the conventions it assumes and requires (pp. 80–81).

Because scholars often seem most adept at ignoring the obvious, typology is a subject neglected in scholarship, even theological scholarship, and is frequently scorned because it is assumed to be bound up with a doctrinaire adherence to Christianity.

One of the areas in which the book shines is definitions. For example, "language" is not tongues, such as German, English or Italian, but the inherent relationship between an idea or object and the verbal expression thereof.

As a second example, Frye makes it clear that when a scholar uses the word "myth," he or she means "a sequential ordering of words." It does not imply "a story that is not really true." To Frye, as to many others, the words "the Bible tells a story" are the same as "the Bible is a myth." Indeed, "myth" is quite the opposite of "not really true"; the word is used to describe a text as being charged with special seriousness and importance.

The Great Code is by no means a traditional Bible commentary, nor does Frye have specific theological points he wants to make. As a result, one need not believe or disbelieve the Bible's religious message to benefit from Frye's discussion, but a sensitive reading of his text should demonstrate that scholarship and faith are not antitheses. To those who would equate scholarship and faith, Frye points out that tangible "proofs" of scripture belong to a mentality that is quite different from the one that produced the scripture, and that those who find it necessary to use such "proofs" have shifted their criterion of truth from scripture to some other reference. In one of the terse gems with which this book is filled, he doubts that "an uncritical attitude is spiritually closer to truth than a critical one" (p. 46). However, he also cautions those who feel uncomfortable dealing with the Bible as a spiritual guide against approaching it from only a poetic standpoint, because there are far too many unpoetic parts to the Bible to support such an approach. Besides, he tells us, such a view reduces Jesus to a fictional character who tells parables about other fictional characters.

In the second part of *The Great Code*, Frye discusses the U-shaped narrative structure of the Bible, a form recognized elsewhere as a common structure of comedy: Humankind loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation. In like fashion, Frye's manuscript takes a U-turn at midpoint and covers its topics again in reverse order but on a different plane. Similarly, a reader starts the journey through this book with a discussion of the origins and uses of types of language and concludes by reading that polysemous (with more than one meaning) writing is a feature of all deeply serious writing, and that the Bible is the model for serious writing.

One of this volume's major points is that our current cultural framework often keeps us from understanding the language used by those who wrote the collection of books now known as the Bible. Even though