

Fall/Winter 2017-2018

AP/EN 4004 6.0A (Y)

Frye and McLuhan

Course Director:

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Delivery Format:

Seminar

Time:

Fridays 11:30am-2:30pm

Description:

This course examines and explores the point-counterpoint Canadian theoretical tradition of Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye. This is a course devoted to exploring the perceptions and thoughts, the provocative and inspiring works, of these two seminal and influential thinkers. It is also a course that explores the influence of their work on other seminal writers and artists; and how literary works reflect and evoke their imaginative and prophetic propositions.

In the first term we will be concentrating on Marshall McLuhan. Our primary text will be *The Book of Probes*. We will be examining his most influential and well-known aphorisms, his tetrads, and the essential explorations he made into the media realm. In McLuhan's final works he wrote—or dictated (most of his last books were collaborations, often conducted through conversation and discussion, with colleagues)—in aphorisms, elliptical epigrams, fragments, mixed modes, all what he chose to call probes.

The second term is devoted to examining the works of Northrop Frye. His studies and literary publications began in the work of William Blake, in the canon-changing book, *Fearful Symmetry*. In that work Frye begins to approach the concept that there could be a deep underlying structure to all of literature. We will explore how spiritual knowledge burst through to him, so he argued, in his final works, beginning especially with *The Great Code*. Frye sought unity behind chaos, and attempted to present to his readers “a new system” of thought and awareness through a radical revision of what we mean by text. Frye thought cosmos could be comprehended through the code buried inside the metaphors of certain great works, primarily The Bible. Thus we will be concentrating on *The Great Code*, with examinations of his more synoptic works, *The Educated Imagination* and his last major essay, *The Double Vision*. We will also be looking at fragments from his late Notebooks. In these works the literary critic and theorist—the author of *Anatomy of Criticism*—enlarged his vision to encompass theology. He became a visionary contrarian—highly controversial in his understanding of The Bible, and his presentation of “counter-history” and the nature of mythic consciousness.

Category:	A
Area:	1 or 7
Period:	3
Historical Requirement:	N/A
Requirements:	<p>*One essay on a McLuhan's aphorism. Due in October. For example: "What is the meaning of the aphorism, 'The Medium is the Massage?'" (20%)</p> <p>** In-class test on McLuhan's thoughts and perceptions. End of term. (20%)</p> <p>***One essay on Northrop Frye. Due in February. Subject matter possibly covering such questions as, "What is the educated imagination? What is great code of literature? And, what is the double vision?" (20%)</p> <p>****In-class test on Frye's thoughts and perceptions. End of term. (20%)</p> <p>*****Class-group presentation in April (date to be discussed): <i>McLuhan and Frye, The Debate that Never Took Place</i>. One group to present the McLuhan side; one group to present the Frye side. Subject matter: Electronic Screen versus Printed Page. (10%)</p> <p>*****Class Participation and Attendance, Preparation for Readings and Discussions, Oral Skills and Engagements with Class Debates, Originality of Research and Readings in Class. (10%)</p>

Reading List:

Term One

On Marshall McLuhan

1. *The Book of Probes*, Marshall McLuhan, edited by David Carson, Eric McLuhan, W. Terrence Gordon (Ginkgo Press)
2. Essays by Marshall McLuhan:
 - "A Historical Approach to the Media" (1955)
 - "Environment to Anti-Environment", "Notes on Burroughs", in *Media Research, Technology, Art, Communication*, edited by Michael A. Moos (Gordon & Beach Arts International)
 - "Pound, Eliot, and the Rhetoric of *The Waste Land*" (1978)

*Available in handouts, during class (but also available on line)
3. "The Waste Land", T.S. Eliot, both versions: 1920 unedited version (available on line, goo.gl/9yDM1/z), and the 1922 canonic version, edited by Ezra Pound (many editions available)
4. *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs
5. John Cage, *Silence* (Wesleyan)
6. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Penguin)

Term Two

On Northrop Frye

1. *The Educated Imagination* (Anansi)
2. *The Great Code* (Penguin)
3. *The Double Vision* (University of Toronto Press)
4. William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Oxford)
5. "The Anthropology of Water", in *Plainwater*, Anne Carson (Knopf)
6. "The Waste Land", T.S. Eliot (the 1922 canonic edition; widely available)
7. *Journey to the East*, Hermann Hesse (Picador, or New Directions)

One cinematic experience: maybe the new *Star Wars* film; to be explored through a McLuhan figure/ground perception, as audience phenomenon, pop-cult expression, example of technological extensions and use of digital format (3D); to be examined through a Frye lens, as example of "The Great Code" in action and the Identity Code Theme.

Open To:

Yr 4 Honours