

## *Summer 2019*

**AP/EN 4004 3.0A (S1)**

***McLuhan and Frye: Canadian Twin Seers***

**Course Director:**

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**Delivery Format:**

Seminar

**Time:**

Mondays & Wednesdays, 4-7 pm

**Description:**

This course examines the point-counterpoint Canadian visionary and perceptual-conceptual tradition of Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye. This course is devoted to exploring the perceptions and ideas, the provocative and inspiring premises and principles, of two seminal, highly influential thinkers. It is a course that looks at these two prophetic thinkers in terms of many of the crises and radical questions that beset us today. These questions include: how can we read the images and symbols of our time? How may we understand the effects of new media on reading and understanding? What is happening to the literary word in the turbulent sea of electronics? Why read books now? How are screens and whirlwinds of data changing our sense and sensibility? Is there a new consciousness emerging in the 21st century, at once expanded and deranged? What is the effect of the displacements of literary culture on deep connective reading?

In the first three weeks we will be concentrating on Marshall McLuhan. Our primary text will be *The Medium is the Massage*. We will examine and expand his most involving, disruptive aphorisms, his tetrad method, a selection of his inciting witticisms, and his essential explorations into the media realm. We will also read *From Cliché to Archetype*, one of his later collaborative works. These works will offer openings for understanding his aphorisms, probes, elliptical epigrams, fragments, mixed modes, and media poetics. His aphorisms will give us seeds that will allow us to unfold his thought and comprehend his powerful literary background, rooted in studies of Renaissance and Symbolist literature. We'll explore how his rogue intellectual approach to awakening readers, his prophetic attempts to awaken us to the awareness of our media environments.

We're deeper into the speed culture now. Ecstasy and anxiety, circuses and info-entertainments, entrance us and disturb us, in relentless waves. How did McLuhan anticipate this? How does he stay ahead of us, waiting for our engagements? In the next three weeks, we will read Northrop Frye's short essay books, *The Educated Imagination* and *The Double Vision*. These seminal works also have had a great influence on writers, poets, thinkers, and teachers; Frye's ideas permeated the teaching approaches in the Humanities for many decades. We will be examining excerpts from *The Great Code*, concentrating primarily on what he means by the hidden narrative allegorical code inside all creative experience. Frye sought unity behind the chaos of the new. He wanted to present his readers with a new inventive method of understanding through linking together literary works, and then to see this in terms of comprehending our lives' quests, our destinies. Frye draws on poetry to guide him, and us, into emergent illuminating consciousness. We will examine how he recognizes anxiety, alienation, absurdity, and anguish ("the four A's", he called them) to be the starting point of doubt and journeys. Out of fear and apparent meaninglessness, what forms may come? How is literary comprehension essential to our sensibilities? How is reading still relevant to us? Frye's short essays and speculative chapters on the great narrative arc through our lives were meant, in their muted passions and heresies, to turn us into visionaries, to intensify sensitivity itself, so that we may break through into new life.

McLuhan and Frye represented a new kind of critical energy: prophetic, imaginative, perceptive, recreative. They also knew one another. They were part of the same school of literature in Toronto. They often debated the other, disagreed with one another. A fascinating, often exciting, conflict existed between them—a necessary friction that offers us insights into alternative ways of engaging our present.

We should call them apocalyptics who saw our time and place, in Canada, anywhere and nowhere, to be crucial. They believed we are at the crossroad of heightened consciousness (in emphatic networks) and cruelty and annihilation (nihilism unleashed).

**Category:**

A

**Historical Requirement:**

N/A

**Requirements:**

Short Essay on Marshall McLuhan	25%
Short Essay on Northrop Frye	25%
Final Take-home Test	40%
Class Engagement	10%

**Reading List:**

1. Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, Gingko Press
2. Marshall McLuhan & Wilfred Watson, *From Cliché to Archetype* (Edited by W. Terrence Gordon), Gingko Press
3. Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, House of Anansi
4. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Penguin, or Marriner, or Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
5. Northrop Frye, *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion*, University of Toronto Press

**Open To:**

YR 4 Honours