

FW 2025-26

AP/EN 4004 6.0A (Y)	Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye: Two Canadian Seers
Course Director:	B.W. Powe Office: 632 Atkinson College Ext.: 33775 e-mail: bpowe@yorku.ca other information: office hours, web address, etc. Office hours, 3-4:30 online, Thursdays and Fridays, fall/winter terms
Time:	Lecture day and time Thursdays 11:30 am to 2:20 pm
Delivery Format:	ONLINE-S
Description:	<p><i>Apocalypse and Alchemy:</i> this course explores the Canadian visionary presence of Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye. It's devoted to engaging the perceptions and thoughts, the provocative and inspiring works of these influential thinkers of mass media and the role of literature. We'll study their seminal impact on novelists, poets, movie directors and artists, how literary and cinema works reflect and evoke their ideas. (See Reading List.)</p> <p>In Term One we focus on McLuhan, the inventor of <i>Media Ecology</i>. Our text will be <i>The Book of Probes</i>. We'll examine his most well-known aphorisms, and the explorations and discoveries he made into the hyper-media realm. In McLuhan's wrote in elliptical epigrams, fragments, mixed modes, what called probes, to record the breakthroughs of new media and their effects on sensibilities and consciousness. <i>McLuhan sought codes that operated through the effects of electronic media. He called electronic media the new texts of Nature—a second creation. His work took on poetic eloquence and allusiveness. Can he be understood as our first poet-theorist of media?</i></p> <p>We'll discuss McLuhan's attempts to frame a <i>Media Ecology</i> for the new environments that communication technologies—AI, ChatGPT4, Bing and Bard, TV, PCs, radio—generate. We'll read novels and essays by contemporary writers who are also looking</p>

at these transformative experiences. AI is now a reality. How did others foresee its effects?

Term Two is devoted to exploring works by Northrop Frye, and to reading novels, essays and poetry that reflect his insights and ideas.

Frye's defense of deep reading centres on the cultivation and practice of imaginative inwardness.

Frye's studies began in the poetry and art of William Blake in the canon-changing book, *Fearful Symmetry*. In that work Frye presents the awareness that there is a deep underlying mythic-poetic-structure to literature. We'll explore how imaginative-spiritual knowledge burst through in his work, beginning with *The Educated Imagination*, *The Double Vision*, and especially *The Great Code*. In these he asks, why read? What is the importance of cultivating literary inwardness? His books teach us to become aware of what words can do to enhance consciousness.

Frye sought aesthetic unity behind chaos to present principles of awareness and perception through transformations of the meaning of poetics. We'll call his approach *Literary Ecology*. He thought cosmos could be comprehended through the codes buried in the metaphors of literary works. We'll concentrate on his synoptic works *The Educated Imagination*, *The Double Vision* and *The Great Code*.

We'll engage their conflicting, contrasting approaches: McLuhan, the satirist and punster, the prophet of e-media and the subliminal environments of electricity; Frye, the seemingly detached scholar whose muted prose masked heretical thinking, sublime intentions. *What do their inspirations and observations, their pursuits of codes and laws, say to us now? Is there something audaciously Canadian in their writings?*

Category:	A
Historical Requirement:	N/A
Requirements:	<p><i>First term:</i> research essay on McLuhan: Exploring the meanings of the aphorisms, <i>The Medium is the Message?</i> and User is Content? (20%). Due in mid-October.</p> <p><i>Second term:</i> research essay on Northrop Frye, a response to one of the following questions: 1. What is the educated imagination? 2. How does the double vision appear in a work of art? (20%) Due in mid-February.</p> <p><i>Take-home test</i> on McLuhan and Frye and the course readings, end of second term. (30%) April 2026.</p> <p><i>One (1) In-Class Presentation</i> on the thinkers, writers, novelists, poets and moviemakers we'll be exploring. (20%) This can be presented by students in <i>either</i> the first term <i>or</i> the second term. There is only one presentation for the year in 4004.</p> <p><i>Class Engagement</i>, wit, oral skills, and participation with class debates, originality of research and readings in class. (10%)</p>
Reading List:	<p><i>Reading List</i> EN 4004, Fall/Winter 2025-2026</p> <p>Term 1</p> <p>Media Environments: alphabet to allforabit, from AEIOU to AI</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marshall McLuhan, <i>The Book of Probes</i> 2. Kathy Acker, <i>Empire of the Senseless</i> 3. Paolo Granata, <i>Media Ecology</i> (selections)/Adam Kirsch, <i>The Revolt Against Humanity: Imagining A Future Without Us</i> 4. Patricia Lockwood, <i>No One is Talking About This</i>

5. Douglas Coupland/Shumon Basar, *The Extreme Self: The 21st century is about who belongs to what*
6. Jeanette Winterson, *The Powerbook*
7. Two works of cinema: *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*; with a reading of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
8. Don DeLillo, *The Silence*

Term 2

Cultivating Inwardness: Practices for the Imagination

1. Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*
2. Patti Smith, *Devotion*
3. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*
4. Northrop Frye, *The Double Vision*
5. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
6. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (selections)
7. Anne Carson, prose poem "The Anthropology of Water," in *Plainwater*
8. Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*

To supplement end of term overview discussion:

Please find time to read *Notes on the Cinematograph* (by Robert Bresson (1986 translation), and to read sections of Rachel Cohen's *A Chance Meeting: American Encounters* (new edition, 2024), which is a book on writers meeting writers. These two books are not formal requirements: they are background writings. They'll help us to see

	<p>the McLuhan and Frye spheres of concern and inspiration, their implications and convergences.</p> <p>All books will be available at the York bookstore.</p>
Open To:	Yr 3, 4 (EN, ENPR, CRWR students only)