From the many analytical efforts devoted to the intellectual correlation between Frye and McLuhan—ranging from journalistic comments to doctoral dissertations, all listed in the indispensable bibliographical work of Robert Denham—I have chosen to begin my remarks with A Climate Charged, by Bruce Powe, which best exemplifies a common perception of irreconcilable differences in the theories of the two scholars. The first chapter of the book, published in 1984 when already a good amount of criticism had been written on the topic, deals with McLuhan, the second chapter with Frye, and the third presents a contrastive summary of their ideas concluding that “they represent two separate paths that are open for writers and thinkers and teachers” (55), and that ultimately one must choose, either McLuhan or Frye, since “the choice between them is not a matter of taste: it is the way through which attention to the world can be reached” (58). My purpose here is to show that it is not convenient nor intellectually profitable to assume an inert juxtaposition of two theories; rather than an “either-or” critical stance, I propose a “both McLuhan and Frye” theoretical association, maintaining that each thinker may indeed shed light on the other for us.

Before turning to elucidate the assumed contrast between Frye’s and McLuhan’s personalities, Powe makes a list of their similarities:

There are of course similarities between them. Both were Canadians partially educated in England, Frye at Oxford in the 1930s, McLuhan at Cambridge at approximately the same time. Both became University of Toronto teachers. Both were conservative in their beliefs and habits. Both wrote from perspectives which
were grounded in religious conviction. Both have superficially similar concerns for myth. But... (55)

To this I would like to add some other obvious elements of association. They were perfect contemporaries as only one year separates their dates of birth, McLuhan 1911 and Frye 1912; they both convened to Toronto from peripheral areas, if one may say so in a country that is itself a large periphery, Frye from the east (Sherbrooke and Moncton), and McLuhan from the west (Edmonton and Winnipeg). Finally, they both were staunch Canadian nationalists who could easily and perhaps more comfortably (at least in the case of McLuhan) put their talents to use in famous universities south of the border, but preferred to remain in Toronto.

To show how a useful critical interaction can be established between the two men’s theories, my first point is based on their individual perception of the Canadian cultural identity. Both critics expressed and repeated their views on the subject a great number of times, but I will refer here only to their parallel contributions to the *Canadian Imagination*, a collection of essays put together by David Staines in 1977.

Frye’s piece, “Haunted by Lack of Ghosts,” is an historical and analytical account of the transformations occurring in Canadian creative imagination from the pioneers’ days to the present. McLuhan’s “Canada: The Borderline Case” supplies a broad cultural justification for these changes. He sees them as effects of the media innovations and applications that occurred in the last century. He points to the centrality of the fringes as the most relevant aspect of the newly established, electrified global culture, maintaining that Canada, compared to other countries, has a definite advantage. One can see from here the different reasons for the two critics’ common patriotism. In Frye there is a sense of belonging to an environment that is growing to maturity; in McLuhan the pride of citizenship comes with the certainty of being where the action is, in global terms. It seems obvious to me that one position can be added to the other with reciprocal support and enhancement without any forced twist of argument, considering that both positions spring from a common reflection on the shared ground, the “place,” the geographical *locus* that subliminally sets the path of a collective imagination.

In reviewing early Canadian poetry, Frye focuses on the haunting image of the Leviathan, figured as the land itself that engulfs the early settlers. The cultural transformations brought about by the development of technology, and by an almost obsessive concern for communication in all of its
various forms, respond to a different mythological outlook. From referring to the Leviathan, Frye shifts to the Minotaur:

Earlier Canadian poetry was full of solitude and loneliness, of the hostility or indifference of nature, of the fragility of human life and values in such an environment. Contemporary Canadian poetry seems to think rather of this outer Leviathan as a kind of objective correlative of some Minotaur that we find in our own mental labyrinths. The mind has become a dark chamber, or _camera obscura_, and its pictures are reflections of what is at once physical and human nature. (42)

The imaginative process, then, has set an inward path, a communal introversion created by new media: Frye states that “the development of technology makes for a growing introversion in life” (44), and mentions the effects of high-rise buildings, superhighways, tunnel-like streets, radio, and television on the human psyche (Ibid.).

This leads us right to the electronic village of Marshall McLuhan, whose substantial contribution to the ideal dialog consists in clarifying wide implications of regional effects created by electronic media. His aphoristic, discontinuous style is quite different from the exquisitely lucid prose of the other, but their basic concern for the interaction of man with nature revolves around the same Blakean axiom, “Where man is not, nature is barren.” We are in the realm of human constructs, with an emphasis on the products of the imagination in Frye, and with more relevance assigned to tangible objects in McLuhan. Each thinker, however, was acutely aware of the other’s center of attention, as I am going to illustrate shortly. As for a similarity with McLuhan’s peculiar aphoristic mode of thinking, I would like to report, without comments, what Frye once said of his personal way of reasoning, “I’m like a squirrel burying nuts—morning, night, everywhere [...] that’s the way my thinking comes to me [...] most of my writings consist of an attempt to translate aphorisms into continuous prose” (Kostelanetz 436).

As in most of McLuhan’s writings, the piece for the _Canadian Imagination_ is made up of insights, or probes, with little or no dialectical elaboration of their implications. With one such probe he enlightens the fundamental difference between North America and the rest of the world:
In Canada and the United States the shared feeling for space is totally different from that of any other part of the world. In England or France or India people go outside to be social and go inside to be private or alone. By contrast, even at our picnics and camping holidays and barbecues we carry the frontier with us. (231-2)

Therefore, “Atwood’s study of the Canadian writers reveals the frontier drama... that is not uniquely Canadian,” as the examples of Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, Thoreau’s *Walden*, and Melville’s *Moby-Dick* illustrate (231). Once he clarified this distinctive North American cultural trait, which certainly widens the interpretative possibilities offered by Northrop Frye’s sense of the frontier, McLuhan proceeds to outline the peculiar characteristics of the Canadian identity. To start, he notices that “American politics were the first to be founded on the printed word” (242). On the other hand, the lack of an official written statement declaring the independence of Canada has meant a continuous struggle with the reversed space of the “mental labyrinth,” in Frye’s expression, of the Canadian imagination. The “melting pot” concept, fostered south of the border but rejected in Canada, clearly shows the difference between the two countries with respect to adapting to a borderline mentality. And of course there is the great recurring fear of “Americanization” which in itself is sign that Canadians are “in” and “out” at the same time, that they are, in short, in an interface position, or resonating interval, which for McLuhan is a vortex of creative energy. It is easy to see, from here, his final point on the issue: since electric media have imposed on us a constant condition of mental interface, Canada is best equipped to deal with the realities of a rapidly transforming global environment. “Yes, Canada is a land of multiple borderlines,” he concludes; “it is these multiple borderlines that constitute Canada’s low profile identity” (246) which contrasts with that of the old centralized nationalism of the industrial age. “Today, when the old industrial hardware is obsolescent,” he says, “we can see that the Canadian condition of low-profile identity and multiple borders approaches the ideal pattern of electronic living” (248). This is McLuhan in 1977: if we think of the socio-political situation of the present time, his words assume a prophetic authority.

The convergence of Frye and McLuhan on the definition of the essence of Canadian culture is only an indication of their shared concern with social issues. For both, this concern derives from a multi-dimensional mode of perception in their respective fields of study. To be sure, Frye always insisted that he was only a literary critic and never went out of bounds, in the sense that he never made a
statement on culture at large that wasn’t founded on literature. The case of McLuhan is different. All his perceptions are focused on the common matrix of all human artifacts, that he called indifferently media or technologies, even when such creations were only products of the mind and not tangible objects. This explains his multi-disciplinary approach, his voracious interest for all information regarding cultural transformations, and to a certain extent his discontinuous and often cryptic prose style. He would look everywhere for clues indicating patterns and processes—a dynamic approach that created some havoc with Frye’s “fixed” archetypes. I would like to bring forth some evidence now, showing how each critic was acutely aware of the other’s work and would occasionally incorporate it into his own. I will discuss McLuhan’s interest in Frye first, beginning with the poignant review of Fearful Symmetry appearing in the Fall 1947 issue of the Sewanee Review.

The piece is entitled “Inside Blake and Hollywood” and includes a parallel discussion on another important book of the time, Magic and Myth of the Movies, by Parker Tyler. The combination should not surprise: it shows a vintage McLuhan at a very early stage of his academic career, four years prior to the publication of The Mechanical Bride, already working on “pattern recognition,” as he would later define his own method of investigation. He makes an initial statement about both books and then proceeds to consider each one separately. He says:

They [the two books] serve to remind us again that one of the principal intellectual developments of the past century or so has been the supplanting of the linear perspective by a multi-locational mode of perception. Among critics of Picasso this new mode is sometimes referred as a “circular point of view” in which a view from above may suddenly become a view from everywhere at once. (719)

Frye’s book, then, is seen as a seminal work, that on the one hand certifies Blake’s breaking of the translatio studii tradition (the linear transmission and perception of culture), and on the other hand firmly establishes the actuality of the poet’s all-encompassing vision. With a sharp, and to a certain extent prophetic, insight he associates Frye’s theory to Giovan Battista Vico’s “intellectual means of being simultaneously present in all periods of the past and all mental climates of the modern world as well” (711). It is from this angle that the unconditional praise of the book emerges:
Fearful Symmetry supplants entirely the work of Middleton Murry and Foster Damon, and of the other exegetists of Blake. For having installed himself inside Blake he does a detailed job of exploration and is able to speak of current issues as we might suppose Blake would have spoken. And, indeed, “the voice of the Bard” is heard with typical emphasis on most contemporary matters, artistic and political. It is at once clear that Blake was a great psychologist with clear insight into the mechanism of human motives and of historical periods—his own included.

(711-12)

The second document that attests McLuhan’s close attention to Frye’s work is an unpublished review of Anatomy of Criticism which he wrote shortly after the book came off the press. I shall attach it here as an appendix to this paper. I must express my gratitude to Philip Marchand, the author of McLuhan’s biography, who discovered this rare text, not to be found in the National Archives in Ottawa where most of the critic’s papers are kept. The cryptic title of the five page review, “Have with You to Madison Avenue or The Flush-Profile of Literature,” is a classic McLuhan probe showing his interest in popular culture as well as his way to incorporate it with the most severe of academic research: the expression “have with you” has a double source since it comes from Tomash Nashe’s book title Have with You to Saffron-Walden, and also from “Have with You to Great Queen Street” by Wyndham Lewis (Satire and Fiction, in Enemy Pamphlets No. 1, 1930); the “flush-profile,” is a technique used by pollsters to gauge TV viewers’ attention. The same kind of hybrid critical attitude McLuhan showed in the other review, but here we find a most remarkable addendum: a specific comment on the archetype as the cornerstone of Frye’s theoretical edifice.

The review may easily be misread for it shows signs of a certain uneasiness on the part of McLuhan (not yet the celebrated author of The Gutenberg Galaxy and Understanding Media) with the fast growing fame of his colleague. Anatomy of Criticism is largely praised, for instance, but it is also said to be “uniquely opaque and almost unreadable” (1).

Contrary to a number of dissenting reviewers, McLuhan praises Frye for getting rid of value judgments in the practice of literary criticism. He does so, obviously, from his own “electronic” perspective:
The Frye approach to criticism as a science turns from the training of taste and discrimination by literary means to the collective producer-orientation of the new mass media of the electronic age. The archetypal approach is in the groove of collective conformity and of group dynamics. (1)

Professor Frye has interpreted the message of the new media aright. Print had in the sixteenth century commanded private interpretation. The fixed stance of the private silent reader, identical with perspective in painting, suggested subliminally the need for an individual viewpoint in all matters. (1)

For four centuries we have been conditioned by the printed word as snap-shot of the postures of the individual mind. Segmental analysis of all motion, mental and industrial, has long been for us the norm of education and of civilized life. But in recent decades Western culture has spawned new technics of snap-shotting the postures of the group mind. (2)

Such technics, he later tells us, include the “flush-profile,” invented by pollsters to measure the level of viewers’ attention to a particular television program by the amount of water “flushed” during the broadcast in a given area. This general response is for McLuhan a scientific indication of a collective posture, or archetypal response. Frye had in fact dealt with similarly collective postures in literature in perfect adherence to the subliminal imperatives of the new environment established by electronic media. In such an environment, McLuhan continues with another of his memorable lines, “man is no longer a monad but a nomad” (3) and “Professor Frye has devised a kind of nomadic bookcase for the cosmic man of today... A Bedouin’s rag of timeless patterns which include all possible arrangements of human experience is indispensable equipment today” (4).

Reading this document I get the strong impression that McLuhan must have felt, as he did with regard to the role of print by reading the works of Harold Innis, that his own theories were being anticipated, but in a twisted way and with a limited perception of their applicability that certainly would not satisfy him. He had been thinking about archetypes for some time, and his participation to a 1949 debate at Hart House between Frye and the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter attest to that (Marchand 117). As the final paragraph of the review shows, he was developing a theory of
archetypes with the same all-encompassing spectrum displayed in Frye’s Anatomy, but from a different point of view. He writes:

Professor Frye is not, perhaps, sufficiently cognizant of one major resource adjacent to his enterprise. The world of ancient and medieval rhetoric was vibrant with archetypes referred to as “the figures of rhetoric.” (4)

This shows that while the function of the archetype for both critics was the same thing (its multi-dimensional power of agglutination), the very essence of it did not coincide. For McLuhan the “figures of rhetoric” were first weakened when frozen on paper with phonetic writing, and then devitalized by the print culture. It was only in recent time, he maintained, with the appearance of electric media, that their original power was reinstated. And finally, of course, there was the fact that Frye would not go beyond literature in its definition of the archetype, “a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one’s literary experience as a whole” (Anatomy 365).

McLuhan continued to meditate on this central notion if only to distance himself from it. In the following years, the mounting recognition of Frye’s theory is attested by his inclusion in the group of contributors to Explorations in Communication, a journal that McLuhan edited with Carpenter. More importantly, in 1970 McLuhan published From Cliché to Archetype where a considered critique of Frye is clearly visible, a critique that continued in the definition of the “law of retrieval” discussed in his last work, Laws of Media, completed by his son Eric and published in 1988. In short, McLuhan had two objections to his colleague’s theory. He disliked the “fixity” of the archetypes in Anatomy and lamented that Frye didn’t open them up to the entire spectrum of human constructs. He reacted, for instance, to the limited number of genres determined, in Frye’s view, by the “radical of presentation” (Anatomy 246-47), which indicates the rhetorical relationship that the author ideally establishes with his/her ideal audience:

By ignoring the oral tradition of both preliterate and postliterate cultures, Professor Frye sets up a system of classifications that apply to a recent segment of human technology and culture—a segment that is rapidly dissolving [...] Today the entire world of rock poetry and of related forms of jazz, of song and speech and dance,
has created a complex world of genre which no professor of literature can ignore if he has any concern about maintaining contact with his students [...] Anthropology, psychology, sociology have all provided contemporary man with new genres of visual literature, and he is, moreover, endlessly fascinated with these. (*From Cliché to Archetype* 87)

I think one has to look at the broader picture in this openly displayed contrast, and realize that the value of genres and archetypes as kernels of a holistic approach to literature and culture remained in McLuhan. Perhaps this is the key for a useful re-reading of his works now that his pop-hero image does not overshadow his genuine scholarship. He worked on the ground measured by Frye, as he did in the field of communication explored by Innis. They constitute the basic context of McLuhan, and of course he held his colleagues in the greatest esteem; of Frye he once said, “Norrie is not struggling for his place in the sun, he is the sun” (Kostelanetz 441), a remarkable comment appropriately picked up by John Ayre for the dust jacket of Frye’s biography. The dossier of Frye’s quotations of McLuhan is a scattered one, but thanks to Denham’s work—again—it is also an easy one to reconstruct. Being an introvert, Frye liked his friend’s wit and humorous ability to enliven a conversation. Their first recorded encounter dates back to the Spring of 1946 (McLuhan’s *Letters* 182), when neither one had published a single book and McLuhan was not yet part of St.Michael’s faculty. The major points of Frye’s criticism, reiterated on several occasions, was that McLuhan had an exaggerated notion of the effects of the print revolution. More specifically, he disputed the that print medium would necessarily lead to a linear mode of perception:

Marshall McLuhan... contrasted a linear, causality-bound, tunnel-vision type of perception with a simultaneous type capable of taking in many aspects of a situation at once. He associated the linear perception with the reading of print and the simultaneous one with the more many-sided appeal of the electronic media. I think these were the wrong referents, because it is only the preliminary process of reading that is really linear: once read, the book becomes a focus of a community, and may come to mean, simultaneously, any number of things to any number of people. The electronic media, on the other hand, vanished so quickly in time that
we can make no sensible use of them without falling back on the continuous ego. I think McLuhan also realized very quickly that these were the wrong referents, but by that time he had been ground up in a mass-media blender and was unable to set the record straight. *(Myth and Metaphor 74-75)*

The statement is very blunt, negative, even condescending, but it doesn’t hide the fact, taken in its context (of “The View from Here,” the article in which it appears), that the simultaneous mode of perception that McLuhan had come to infer from the “wrong referents” and to extend to all expressions of human activities, was the very same that Frye had worked out from literature alone. Both their superficial differences and their fundamental similarities can be extracted by their favorite metaphors for an all-encompassing perception of reality. To the connected *visuality* of linear perspective, McLuhan contrasted his notion of the *audio-tactile*, cool and resonating interval. Frye speaks of *vision* instead, for the same kind of *Gestalt* perception. The following statement, from *Words with Power*, illustrates his point:

*The act of reading, or its equivalent, consists of two operations that succeed one another in time. The first follows the narrative, from the first page to the last: once this pursuit of narrative through time is complete, we make a second act of response, a kind of *Gestalt* or simultaneous understanding, where we try to take in the entire significance of what we have read or listened to. The first response is conventionally one of the listening ear, even if we are reading a written text. The association of the second response with the visual metaphors is almost inevitable.*

*(69)*

McLuhan would simply reverse the sensorial references in the last two sentences to close in argument in his favour. In any case, although the metaphors change, the *Gestalt* at the end remains the same. It is the constant drive towards the synthesis that Frye appreciated in McLuhan, and this is why he made several references to his axioms or aphorisms, often in crucial passages of his own essays. In the address to the American Academy of Arts in 1981, for instance, one year after McLuhan’s death, he closed his remarks with the following statement:
But metaphor was made for man and not man for metaphor, or as my late and much beloved colleague Marshall McLuhan used to say, man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a metaphor? (Myth and Metaphor 237)

The aphorism comes from the “Introduction” to Through the Vanishing Point, which is one of the least famous books by McLuhan; the quotation, therefore, confirms Frye’s constant interest in his friend’s work. In the “Expanding World of Metaphor,” written in 1985 and also included in the Selected Essays, Frye uses one of the most debated among McLuhan’s axioms and makes it his own to clarify the formal structure of the poetic discourse:

If there is anything to be said for McLuhan’s axiom that the content of any given medium is the form of a previous medium, then the content of written poetry is the form of oral poetry, which seems invariably to precede it historically. (110)

In quoting this essential dictum of McLuhan, that comes straight from the first and most theoretically “loaded” chapter of Understanding Media, Frye is not just paying a tribute of friendship to a respected colleague, he is actualizing his thought.

I would like to conclude with some Canadian notes by Frye, returning to the first topic discussed in this paper, whose circularity is not meant here to indicate any idea of completeness in the exploration of a problematic intellectual relationship, but to suggest the clarity of the effective critical profitability that comes from the combination of two diverse but not opposite theories. The final chapter of Divisions on a Ground, a “resonating” title that refers to the Canadian physical as well as imaginative space, is entitled “The Rear-View Mirror: Notes Toward a Future,” where the future is represented by the body of students of the new generation. Now, the unusual metaphor was one of the most commonly used by McLuhan. He said:

Most people... still cling to what I call the rearview-mirror view of their world. By this I mean to say that because of the invisibility of the environment during the period of its innovation, man is only consiously aware of the environment that has preceded it; in other words, an environment becomes fully visible only when it has been superseded by a new environment; thus we are always one step behind in
our view of the world. Because we are benumbed by any new technology—which in turn creates a totally new environment—we tend to make the old environment more visible; we do so by turning it into and art form and by attaching ourselves to the objects and atmosphere that characterized it, just as we have done with jazz, and we’re now doing with the garbage of the mechanical environment via pop art. *(Playboy 56)*

Another example he used to make the point clear is that of the automobile; it was called “horseless carriage” when it first appeared on the street, with an obviously mistaken subliminal context of dirt roads, farms and haystacks, rather than a correct one suggesting highways, gas stations, motels and suburban communities. The need to contextualize anew every innovative medium appears to be one of the least controversial among McLuhan’s ideas. In Frye's hands the metaphor takes an apparently different dimension. The “rear-view mirror,” he maintains, is the only way we have to look at the future, “because nobody knows one instant of the future, except by analogy with the past” (183). I suggest that there is no real opposition between the two theories; Frye simply stops at the retrieval phase of every new cultural reality, while McLuhan probes the process of proliferation generated by the establishment of new media which *make* that cultural reality.

Finally, If we look at the educational function of both insights, which is what the two critics had in mind in the first place, we find a perfect coincidence. Frye's reinterpretation of the past, which is the duty and responsibility of every new generation, leads to the fundamental function of the teacher: to make students aware of their assumptions and to question them (185). And McLuhan has this to say:

> A good teacher won’t just offer his students a package, but a do-it-yourself kit. He will put him into a point of awareness. He will force him out of his previous mode of thinking. A good teacher saves you time. (Powe 28)

The ways through which attention to the world can be reached may be different, as Powe says (58), but awareness, the point of arrival, which is the starter’s line for every student in the humanities, is exactly the same for both McLuhan and Frye.
WORKS CITED


__________. “The View from Here,” in *Myth and Metaphor*, 63-78.


__________. “Have with You to Madison Avenue, or The Flush-Profile of Literature,” previously unpublished, see “Appendix.”


APPENDIX 1


Inside Blake and Hollywood

There is a sufficient similarity of approach to the subject in these two books to justify their being bracketed for discussion. They serve to remind us again that one of the principal intellectual developments of the past century or so has been the supplanting of linear perspective by a multi-locational mode of perception. Among critics of Picasso this new mode is sometimes referred to as a "circulating point of view" in which a view from above may suddenly become a view from everywhere at once. When this mode appears in a work of philosophy (as it does for the first time in E. Gilson’s *The Unity of Philosophical experience*) the possibilities for compression and for organic interrelation of facts, pressures, and ideas is altogether a new thing. It represents a real advance in the tools of intellectual analysis. And that this new way of making and also of deciphering ideographs should be inseparable from the achievement of Vico and Freud is only natural. For it has come about through the awareness of the unity of mythopoeic activity in history and art, and it has given modern man a sense once more of the simultaneity of all history seen at the psychological and intellectual level, as well as of the close bonds between all members of the human family past and present.

Blake’s view was that "history as linear time is the great apocripha of mystery which has to be rejected" since “the whole of human life is seen and understood as a single mental form" (340). The linear view of history began with Petrarch and Leonardo da Vinci and ended with Gibbon and Hume. So obsessive a metaphor as that of the linear perspective is important enough to deserve some explanation, especially since we are now deep in the process of extricating ourselves from it. For it still holds firmly among such inheritors of eighteenth-century rationalism as the sociologists and the Marxists.

Briefly, the linear metaphor grew up in connection with the medieval notion of the *translatio studii*, the continuous transmission of culture from Greece to Rome, from Rome to Britain and to the court of Charlemagne. So that Abelard could regard Paris in the Twelfth Century as the lineal descendant and the sole legatee of Athens. This notion of *translatio studii*, however, was curiously jolted by the quarrel which developed between the new scholastic theology and the traditional patristic or humanist theology. The quarrel began in the Twelfth Century between Abelard and St. Bernard. Two hundred years later Petrarch had reduced and confused the matter to merely nationalist terms. The schoolmen, whom he regarded as the barbarians or the Goths and Huns of learning, had met with no opposition outside Chartres, Orleans, and Italy. L. J. Paetow summed it up concisely: “Now the lowest ebb in the study of ancient classical literature occured in the century which preceded Petrarch. So low it was that he and his contemporaries believed that the dry and barren period on which they had fallen must have extended back for centuries to the last days of classic Latin literature.” It is only in this context that Petrarch’s celebrated statement about his being a man placed between two ages makes sense. Ant it is this passage which focuses that sense of linear perspective which still ruled the imagination of Gibbon.

E. Gilson discusses the entire question in chapter X of his revision of *La Philosophie au Moyen Age*, explaining in its context (728) Petrarch’s statement that he was “placed on the frontier of two peoples looking both backwards and forwards." The supposition has been that these “two
peoples” were those of the Middle Ages and those of the Renaissance—those of a dead past and a living future. But Petrarch refers to a living past and a dead future, exactly as Gibbon does. Behind him he saw a great antiquity followed by centuries which gradually relinquished the ancient inheritance. Before him he could see only a period in which the already dim and blurred memories of antiquity were to pass into a final night of oblivion.

Here, at any rate, is the origin of the metaphor of simple linear perspective which yields in Vico to a complex genetic metaphor that becomes the intellectual means of being simultaneously present in all periods of the past and all mental climates of the modern world as well. For Vico contains Wordsworth, Freud, and Malinowski by anticipation in answering the question: “Exactly how do people so remote in time or culture or condition as Lucy Gray or Ivanhoe or a neurotic or a Trobriander feel? What is the world they know?”

Professor Frye takes us inside Blake in this way. Fearful Symmetry supplants entirely the work of Middleton Murry and Foster Damon, and of the other exegetists of Blake. For having installed himself inside Blake he does a detailed job of exploration and is able to speak of current issues as we might suppose Blake would have spoken. And, indeed, “the voice of the bard” is heard with typical emphasis on most contemporary matters, artistic and political. It is at once clear that Blake was a great psychologist with clear insight into the mechanism of human motives and of historical periods—his own included. And his psychological insights grew into an all-embracing system which was nothing short of ferocious in its rationalistic completeness.

That is the paradox of Blake—that he so largely became the image of the thing he hated and fought, namely Lockean rationalism and abstraction. In Professor Frye’s words:

Blake was, it is obvious, so conscious of the shape of his central myth that his characters become almost diagrammatic. The eroism of Orc or the ululation of Ololon do not impress us as human realities, like Achilles or Cassandra, but as intellectual ideographs. It all depends on whether the reader has a taste for this kind of metaphysical poetry or not... what there is in Blake is a dialectic, an anatomy of poetry, a rigorously unified vision of the essential forms of the creative mind piercing through its features to its articulate bones (145).

Unlike Vico and Joyce but like Freud, Blake mistook a psychology for metaphysics and theology. His rigorous monism had no place for “the many” save as modes of primal, divine energy. The created world is a part of fallen god-head and is essentially evil. Existence and corruption are the same. This makes for simplicity, intensity and inclusiveness of outlook, but it may not have been of as much use to Blake the poet as he himself supposed. It make Blake an encyclopedic allegorist but it also led him to attach a final rather than a provisional value to his allegorical imagery. That is, Blake was not so much concerned with the visual and dramatic character of his imagery as with its intellectual meaning. So that reading Professor Frye is a more satisfactory ting for most of Blake that reading Blake himself. The great poetic allegorist like Dante proceed by simile, although the entire work is a huge metaphor. Blake proceeds by metaphor or identity of tenor and vehicle and ends up with a work which requires a key to open. His intellectual structure is not realized dramatically in the “major” poems but has to be set beside them. Professor Frye does not regard this as a defect since his business in his book is exegesis and not criticism:

No student of Blake can fail to be deeply impressed by the promptness with which Blake seized on the machine as the symbol of a new kind of human existence developing in his own time. His poetry is an imaginative mechanism designed to fight the machine age; it
has the "wheels within wheels" of Ezekiel's vision which will reverse the direction of the "wheel without wheel with cogs tyrannic Moving by compulsion each other..." (359).

Professor Frye's inside view of Blake in which every part of the bard's thought is seen to have a strict etiolation and coherence is perhaps in need of some further development from the outside. Blake is psychologically in the tradition of patristic allegory unbroken from Philo of Alexander to the Cambridge Platonists, and he needs to be closely compared and contrasted with Vico. But much gratitude is due to Professor Frye for having brought into a conclusive focus all the elements of Blake's thought and feeling.

Parker Tyler is the first American to give serious attention to popular culture as it is expressed by Hollywood and Magic and Myth of the Movies is a sequel to Hollywood Allucination. Mr. Tyler substitutes perception for abuse or passivity—the only current attitudes to Hollywood as to all popular culture. Just how it has been possible for those who regard Joyce and Eliot with respect to exempt themselves from a rigorous evaluation of every phase of commercial culture is perhaps only to be explained by the obsession with mechanistic abstraction which an industrial society imposes. For example, the Ford motor company has in its museum working models of all locomotives and all motor cars ever made. But it has no record of production methods employed in the manufacture of its early cars & a fact which rightly shocked S. Giedion. However, the kind of repercussion which every phase of the technological world may have on the artist and on the modes of our sensibility is illustrated frequently in Moholy-Nagy's Vision in Motion. Apropos of the seemingly disparate themes of Joyce and Ford cars, he points out on page 350, for example, that "one can find in Joyce's writings analogies to contemporary technological terms... manifolded word agglutinations (often constructed from German, Hungarian or other composites...) ... similar to the industrial process of assemblage..." Joyce, of course, was extremely conscious of scores of inter-related analogies in the modes of his artistic activity. And Eliot is explicit:

It was here, in the kitchen in the passage,
In the mews in the barn in the byre in the market place
In our veins our bowels our skulls as well
As well as in the plotting of potentates.

Committed to an atomistic conception of himself and society, the American intellectual doesn't really credit these things. Movies aren't avant garde; therefore they are insignificant. This, in a word, is why the avant garde has to be imported. So Mr. Tyler's book have been given a gentle brush—off in spite of his showing that vulgar and commercial entertainment is often of great psychological complexity and that there is nothing in high art which doesn't appear in some confused mode in low art.

A major postulate of Mr. Tyler is illustrated in his statement that:

the rudimentary camera trick, for instance, that of appearing and disappearing persons, which occurs in the wink of an eye, is a visualization of the correspondence between matter and spirit that was a cardinal tenet in the beliefs of primordial savages (255-56).

This sets The Golden Bough right in the Hollywood Bowl. It further implies that every mode of technology is a reflex of our most intimate psychological experience. The pointillage of Seurat is a derivative of Humean association psychology and exfoliates again in modern wire-photos. Movie technique has obvious relations with the panoramic devices of Scott and Tolstoy. And the close–
up, as well as darkroom projection, can be traced back to the Rembradt “point of light” school in the same way. If this should seem “merely mechanical” it can be shown that the entire conception of characterization in novel and drama since the mid-Eighteenth Century is similarly based on sensationalism divorced from any scheme of social and moral references. That is merely another point of view from which to observe the “picturesque” characters of modern fiction from Clarissa onwards. They stand in a palpitating focus of self-awareness.

It is in this sort of way that Mr. Tyler takes us inside Hollywood with its mushrooming symbolism. Exuberance of semi-conscious and uncontrolled symbols on one hand, and shrewd technical and commercial control on the other. For all the conscious intellectual activity of an industrial society is directed to non-human ends. Its human dimensions are systematically distorted by every conscious resource while the unconscious and commercially unutilized powers struggle dimly to restore balance and order by homeopathic means.

It is for this reason that Hollywood dominates the psychic life of America. It provides the night-dream actuality. Mr. Tyler’s great merit is that he explores the multiple modes of the movie night-dream as it is his limitation seldom if ever to emerge from that dream. He is quite frank about his purpose not to “analyze the best movies as the artistic best but as the mythological best," and like Mr. William Epson he has no technique of evaluation of the products he explores. Nor does he consider many of the moral, social or political wherefores of Hollywood’s deep artistic anemia. Thus in discussing the anomalous excellence of S. Ansky’s The Dybbuk he can find no criterion for placing the essential Hollywood impotence. He rightly finds The Song of Bernadett repulsive but his tools of analysis do not carry him to the point where he can isolate the cliche and timidity as rooted in the death of all intellectual impulse. This in turn is related to Mr. Tyler’s lack of expressed awareness of the perennial uses and necessity of art in maintaining social viability. He does a fine job of reading the enigmas of the fever chart from the movies but of the positive function of popular art for good or ill he says nothing.

But this should not be too disturbing since there has been no lack of critics who have proclaimed the uplifting qualities of the movies without having noticed anything whatever of what was going on in them. Mr. Tyler is right, therefore, to concentrate attention on the complexity and eminent snidness of movie art as preliminary to opening up a plenary critique.

APPENDIX 2
Previously unpublished review of Anatomy of Criticism by Marshall McLuhan

Have with You to Madison Avenue
or
The Flush-Profile of Literature

It is natural for the literary man to underestimate the relevance of Professor Frye’s archetypal approach to literature. The man of letters expects the literary form to offer a good deal of private consumer satisfaction, and there is nothing private or consumer-oriented in Professor Frye’s approach. The Frye’s approach to criticism as a science turns from the training of taste and discrimination by literary means to the collective producer-orientation of the new mass media of the electronic age. The archetypal approach is the groove of collective conformity and of group--
dynamics, which may explain why a uniquely opaque and almost unreadable book should have become a book-of-the-month choice.

In the same way, the off-Madison Avenue of the run-of-the-mill graduate student finds it quite unimportant that he does not understand Professor Frye. He knows that Frye is "with it" and that group participation or togetherness in the aura of such leadership is far more satisfying than private interpretation.

Professor Frye has interpreted the message of the new media aright. Print had in the sixteenth century commanded private interpretation. The fixed stance of the private silent reader, identical with perspective in painting, suggested subliminally the need for an individual viewpoint in all matters. Hamlet confronted by his father's ghost asserts that "thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain." Then he snatches his "tables": Meet it is I set it down, that one may smile and smile and be a villain; at least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark."

It had occurred to Montaigne that the snap-shotting of the impressions of the mind was the real message of the printed and written form. Shakespeare certainly made that point in this scene, even joking over the Montaigne technique of doubt, "At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark." For four centuries we have been conditioned by the printed word as snap-shot of the postures of the individual mind. Segmental analysis of all motion, mental and industrial, has long been for us the norm of education and of civilized life.

But in recent decades Western culture has spawned totally new techniques of snap-shotting the postures of the group-mind. Statistical charts of group postures reached a kind of lyric pause or "moment out of time" with the discovery of the "flush-profile" which put the shaky intuitions of individual students of public attitudes on a scientific basis. The flush-profile which hoicks the poet out of his ivory tower and puts him in the partners' room of B.B.D. and O., as it were, is derived from the data of the city water engineer. At program breaks the additional water used in toilet-flushing was seen to provide a reliable archetype of the group posture of mind for that program.

Now it is obvious that such an archetype or profile of collective awareness offers small consumer satisfaction in itself. And Professor Frye would disclaim the notion that even the most diaphonous archetype could afford consumer satisfaction to a reader. These profiles or nuclear models of collective postures are not literary bon-bons for passive savoring but rather scientific data suited to the austere producer-oriented mind, data necessary to the public relations engineer and the shaper and ruler of societies. Like Sputnik they have a hook in outer space whence they relay signals to us, blip calling unto blip in the universe of the pictorialized word.

It is natural, therefore, that Professor Frye should have betaken himself to the anthropologist and to the folklorist for his profile of literature. These students of pre-literate man provide the scienstific archetypes or snapshots of the postures of collective man which now recommend themselves to many keen spirits in the post-literate age of conformity and of global stereotypes. For the characteristic mode of learning and knowing since telegraph offers a pattern of instantaneous inter-cultural x-ray, very different from the enclosed spaces of literature. Man is no longer monad but nomad.

A literary man describing a people past or present adopts a slant, a point of view. He selects. He structures his image with syntactical bonds of perspective in the style of Hume, Gibbon, or Macaulay. But a century ago, with the photograph, there came new presentation. The photo, as William Ivins explain in *Prints and Visual Communication*, permits total statement without syntax. And the student of pre-literate man found this kind of non-personal recording of collective social behaviour very needful. Not the personal point of view, nor the partiality of perspective and self-expression, but the catalyst role of the non-personal chemical medium became the natural bias of the social sciences and symbolist artists alike.
That is why the archetypal profiles of literature offered as a new science of criticism may strike literary people as too much like the world of Mighty Mouse, of Space Cadet, and of the Madison Avenue portraitist of public postures. They are not quick to see that Professor Frye has devised a kind of nomadic bookcase for the cosmic man of today who is inevitably a mental D.P. A bedouin’s rag of timeless patterns which include all possible arrangements of human experience is indispensable equipment today.

Seen from the split-level picture-window House of Archetypes, the receding world of Western literature may look appallingly like a silent movie on a late TV show. But for those who recognize the importance of aligning all education with the dynamics of the new mass media, the deft and decent burial of literature provided by the *Anatomy of Criticism* will come as an exhilarating climax to the slower-paced preliminaries of the literary centuries.

Professor Frye is not, perhaps, sufficiently cognizant of one major resource adjacent to his enterprise. The world of ancient and medieval rhetoric was vibrant with archetypes referred to as “the figures of rhetoric.” These figures are, it is true, postures only of the individual mind which had become accessible to observation and control after phonetic writing. The written word arrested the mental and verbal flux of the fast-talking Mediterraneans and gave them the means of classifying hundreds of mental postures such as chiasmus, catachresis, and scatalogie. These figures or postures of the mind were like so many whales left immobilized amidst the shallows and sands of the written word. And in due time their odor began to be abroad in the land. Writing, however, as a means of capturing, or perhaps of fashioning, the postures of the individual mind has proved to be fatally committed to the fostering of individual expression and eloquence. It is flawed by preference for the humanistic and might well prove to be but a feeble prop for a scientific enterprise such as that of Professor Frye. As it is, even without the aid of such pipe-line of natural gas from the farther shores of rhetoric, Frye has secured a vehicle which by-passes all rhetorical expression of this personal type, and makes possible the deploying of the total resources of pre-literate culture on to Madison Avenue testing ground. This in turn will greatly hasten the mopping up of remnants of private awareness and expression such as now give a confused and unsettled character to the literary and educational scene. So that what has here begun on a momentary flush-profile of literary postures will develop into a genuine chain reaction, and the remnants of a decadent form of personal expression can be dispatched down the drain.