



The Novel in the Media Age • ENGL7/8394 • Fall 2021

Professor:

Donal Harris

Class Information:

Mon: 5:30-8:30p / Location: TBA

Contact:

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Office Hours:

M & W: 12-2p & by appt.

Course Content: How do novels – and “The Novel,” in its abstract generality – fit into the contemporary media landscape? And how has the relationship between narrative form and media format changed since the advent of “mass media” in late-nineteenth century?

These are the paired questions that will guide this course as we explore the stylistic and technological development of the novel in the U.S since the 1890s. Advocates of “the literary” often describe media technologies (the printing press, phonography, photography, film, television, social media, etc.) and their respective content (“mass culture”) in the pejorative: bland, thoughtless, commercial, standardized. Yet we will uncover the wide range of positions that particular authors and critics adopt when framing the novel within, outside, and against other media and narrative forms.

Rather than provide a survey of The Great American Novel or a chronology of always-new, ever-better media, we’ll select a few case studies of longish prose fiction that, at particular moments, exemplify some of the key formal, textual, methodological, and theoretical issues at stake in both literary studies and media theory.

Likely authors include Stephen Crane, James Weldon Johnson, Willa Cather, Nathanael West, Jerzy Kosinski, Ishmael Reed, Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie, and Ling Ma. Supplemental readings include classic and cutting-edge work in book studies (Robert Darnton, Leah Price, Jessica Pressman), media studies (Kittler, McLuhan, Gitelman), and novel theory (Lukacs, Gallagher, Saldivar). A full reading list will be available by early May ‘21.

Course requirements will mirror common genres in the academic humanities: semi-regular response papers, book review or teaching portfolio, conference proposal, and a final research project.