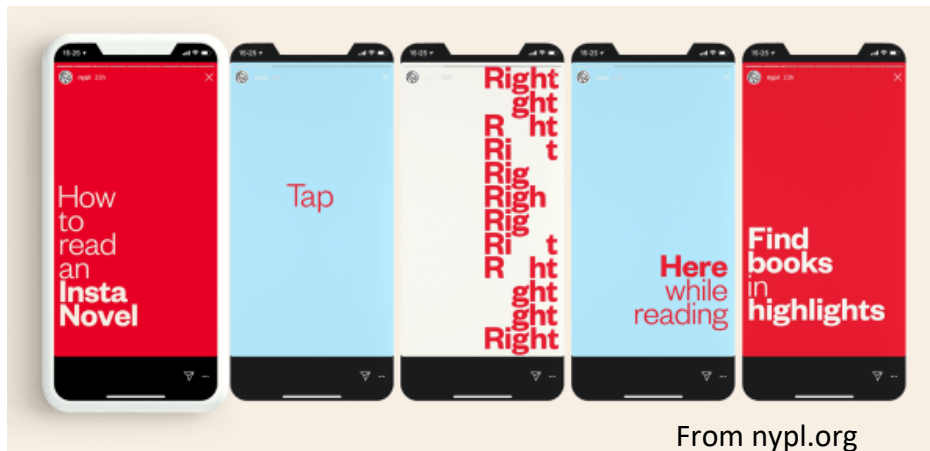# Institutions of the American Novel

Donal Harris (donal.harris@memphis.edu)// ENGL7/8391 // Monday, 5:30-8:30pm

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Thanks to the New York Public Library, you can now read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* as an "Insta novel," consciously mimicking the look of Instagram Stories, on your iPhone. This unlikely mix of a nineteenth-century Progressive institution, a turn-of-the century magazine story, and a dominant twenty-first century media technology for sharing narratives about the self, opens up a range of questions about how novels get into the hands (or, more recently, onto the screens) of readers and, even more, how different intermediaries shape both the style and circulation of literature in the U.S.

This course will look at the development of the American novel by way of the many overlapping institutions that shape it on its path from an author to, ideally, many readers: publishing houses, literary agents, little magazines, public libraries, private booksellers, ELA and English classrooms, Hollywood (and HBO) adaptations, translators, and the literary octopus that is Amazon.com. Rather than a history of the Great American Novel, we'll look at examples of longish prose that exemplify some of the key formal, textual, methodological, and theoretical issues at stake in considering the institutional contexts of the American novel. Likely authors include Gilman, Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Gillian Flynn. Secondary readings include examples from book studies (Robert Darnton, Leah Price), sociology of literature (John Thompson, Jan Radway), and media studies (McLuhan, Gitelman, and Hayles). A full reading list will be available by late May.

Course participants will also have the opportunity to work directly with Memphis Public Library's Cossitt Branch and Digital Branch to produce original archival research, plan programming, and publish public writings.

Course requirements: semi-regular short writings, an academic book review or teaching portfolio, and a final research project.