
ENGL 4454 & 6454: Studies in Forms and Genres “Advertising, Fiction, and the Arts of Persuasion”

Instructor.	Dr. Darryl P. Domingo	Office Hrs.	Tues. 11:05-12:05
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Course Description. Writing in the pages of *Advertising Age* in 1976, the media theorist Marshall McLuhan famously claimed that “advertising is the greatest art form of the twentieth century.” In this combined section of ENGL 4454 and 6454, we will test the legitimacy of McLuhan’s seemingly hyperbolic claim by examining the intersections between advertising as art form and the novel as literary genre. Although we usually dismiss ads as crassly commercial, as a debased use of the imagination, or simply as annoying, McLuhan reminds us that considerable aesthetic skill goes into the creation of an effective marketing campaign. In this course, we will study the language, logic, and verbal-visual rhetoric of twentieth- and twenty-first-century advertising, pairing discussion of print ads, radio spots, television commercials, product placements, billboards, promotional merchandise, websites, internet pop-ups and pre-rolls with analysis of modern and post-modern fiction that represents the advertising industry in complex and compelling ways. Given the emphasis in advertising on telling a good story, our primary focus will be on novels featuring characters who spend their time in marketing firms working as canvassers or copywriters, or who spend their money in shopping malls, grocery stores, or e-commerce sites purchasing needless commodities—characters who either produce advertising or are consumed by it.

An assumption of the course will be that the techniques employed by authors to engage readers have much in common with the rhetorical devices used by advertisers to persuade consumers to buy what they are selling. If rhetoric is the traditional art of persuasion, then advertising is the modern business of persuasion. How does advertising reconcile the conventional conflict between art and business? What kinds of appeals do advertisers make to consumers, and how do these compare to the relationship cultivated between author and reader? What is the ethics of advertising, and how does it relate to the ethics of fiction? Is all promotion self-promotion and is literature merely a luxury product to be bought and sold? “Advertising, Fiction, and the Arts of Persuasion” will attempt to answer some of these questions, while encouraging students to re-evaluate one of the most pervasive—if least respectable—aspects of their daily lives.

Required Reading.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Edible Woman* (1969). Toronto: Anchor Books, 1998 / 9780385491068.
Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Ed. James L.W. West III. New York: Scribner, 2004 / 9780743273565.
Kenney, John. *Truth in Advertising. A Novel*. New York: Touchstone, 2013 / 9781451675559.

Kleeman, Alexandra. *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*. New York: HarperCollins, 2015 / 9780062388674.

Wells, H.G. *Tono-Bungay* (1909). Eds. Patrick Parrinder and Edward Mendelson. New York: Penguin Books, 2005 / 9780141441115.

Essex, Andrew. *The End of Advertising: Why It Had to Die, and the Creative Resurrection to Come*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2017 / 9780399588518.

O'Reilly, Terry and Mike Tennant. *The Age of Persuasion: How Marketing Ate Our Culture*. Toronto, 2009; Rpt. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011 / 9781582437248.

Twitchell, James B. *Twenty Ads that Shook the World: The Century's Most Groundbreaking Advertising and How It Changed Us All*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000. 9780609807231.

Learning Outcomes. Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- historicize the development of advertising over time and analyze the rhetorical, linguistic, and literary conventions of advertising *as* art form;
- identify basic narrative forms and define literary terms related to the novel *as* genre;
- describe the persuasive techniques employed by historical and contemporary advertising;
- appreciate the complex relationship between art and business, elite and consumer culture;
- cultivate commercial literacy and research methods relevant to the real world;
- reflect upon the value of English Studies to careers outside of the Humanities.



Lemon.

This Volkswagen missed the boat. The chrome strip on the glove compartment is blighted and must be replaced. Chances are you wouldn't have noticed it; Inspector Kurt Kriener did. There are 3,289 men at our Wolfsburg factory with only one job: to inspect Volkswagens at each stage of production. 100,000 Volkswagens are produced daily; there are more inspectors

than cars! Every shock absorber is tested (spot checking won't do), every windshield is scanned. VWs have been rejected for surface scratches barely visible to the eye. Final inspection is really something! VW inspectors run each car off the line onto the Funktionsprüfstand (car test stand), tote up 189 check points, gun aimed to the automatic

brake stand, and say "no" to one VW out of fifty.

This preoccupation with detail means the VW lasts longer and requires less maintenance, by and large, than other cars. It also means a used VW depreciates less than any other car.)

We pluck the lemons; you get the plums.

