

## **Political Novel and Cinema**

**Saturday 12 - 1 P.M.(or 11 - 12 P.M) Google Meet**

Alternative time option: Tuesday 11 A.M. - 12 P.M.

Though all art can be approached in a political context, or even interpreted as actively political, the novel has a particularly strong claim to being an inherently political form. Societal and political themes--such as class struggle and class consciousness, race and race relations, national and cultural identity, labor relations and the rights of workers, gender and sexuality--not only abound in the novel genre but are inextricable from it as the form that seeks to encapsulate and embody the experience of life in the modern world. But although every novel is political, some novels are deliberately, actively so. This seminar will discuss notable texts within the novel genre that engage with political themes. However, the seminar goes beyond simply positing that plot events overtly relating to class, nation et cetera render a novel "political." Discussions will probe deeper questions, such as:

- how different theoretical definitions of the novel form may necessitate different views of its engagement with politics
- whether novel-adjacent forms (such as the novella and the feature film) have similar inherently close relationships with politics
- whether the novel form is simply ambivalently "political," or has a particular inherent leaning/agenda

and many more. The seminar will focus on novels and politics in Europe and the United States, with a historical range from the mid-nineteenth to late twentieth centuries. We will also be screening major works of what we might call "political cinema" to complement and enhance our discussion of these political narratives.

Each week, before midnight on Friday, you will submit a **brief paragraph** (around 250 words) about the reading and/or the film. Each week has questions added to help you come up with things to say. In your response, you can give answers to those questions, or you can:

- ask questions of your own
- talk about something in the text that you found especially striking
- draw comparisons with another text, either from the syllabus or from your own reading.

## **Sample Week-by-week Schedule & Accompanying Guiding Questions**

Week 1: Stendhal, [\*The Red and the Black\*](#) (1830), chapters 1-15

Questions:

- 1) Julien has **strong feelings about Napoleon. Why do you think that is?** (You might want to do a little background reading on Napoleon for this; Wikipedia is fine!)
- 2) **What are Julien's goals?** Why doesn't he think Fouquet can help him achieve them? What do you think Julien's goals and decisions say about early 19th-century French society?

Week 5: Dickens, "A Christmas Carol" (1843); Capra, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)

Questions:

- 1) **Is "A Christmas Carol" a political novel? Why or why not?** (Take both of the concepts, "political" and "novel," into account.)
- 2) **What might these texts have in common?** What (if anything) makes it useful or interesting to put them together?

Week 6: Dostoevsky, [\*Demons\*](#) (1872), part 1

Questions:

- 1) **What is the role of the French language** in the argument this book is making? Is that message the same regardless of which character is speaking?