This course surveys the “Hollywood novel” and the “Hollywood film,” exploring how literary and visual texts turn their gaze back onto Hollywood itself—the “dream factory” of the United States. We begin with the emergence of American cinema and conclude with some recent (c. 2000—) films about Hollywood which, in the post-studio era, often approach the nostalgic (The Artist, 2011); the horrific (The Neon Demon, 2016), or the satirical (Maps to the Stars, 2014).

Books range from F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Last Tycoon, Horace McCoy’s They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?, Dorothy Hughes' In a Lonely Place, and Bruce Wagner’s I’m Losing You.

All films are streamed; all texts are provided in digital copy (PDF, etc.).

Course expectations:

1. Reader responses (2-3 pages, doublespaced) ahead of each class meeting. These responses should identify, with specific examples, key issues in the text and the film(s) that stood out to you, with particular attention to how they may speak to each other. (20%)
2. Midterm essay: short (4-5 pages, doublespaced) analysis of a single text or film, dealing with any topic covered to that point. (30%)
3. Final paper (8-10 pages, doublespaced) on any aspect of Hollywood self-reflexivity as developed through screenings, texts, and course discussion. (30%)
4. Participation in the form of engaged discussion during class. (20%)

Novels

Harry Leon Wilson, Merton of the Movies (1922)
Horace McCoy, They Shoot Horses Don't They? (1935)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon (1940)
Budd Schulberg, What Makes Sammy Run (1941)
Dorothy Hughes, In a Lonely Place (1947)
Bruce Wagner, I’m Losing You (1996)

Supplemental

Rick Altman, Film/Genre (London: BFI, 1999)
May 26: Introduction, the rube film, spectatorial relations, star appeal

- Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show (Porter, 1902)
- The Story the Biograph Told (Biograph, 1903)
- Mabel’s Dramatic Career (Sennett, 1913)
- His New Job (Chaplin, 1915)

May 28: Stardom in the silent era

- Souls for Sale (Hughes, 1923)
- Harry Leon Wilson, Merton of the Movies

June 2: The Great Depression and the recurring national dream of stardom

- Horace McCoy, They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?

June 4: The studio

- The Stand-In (Garnett, 1938)
- Budd Schulberg, What Makes Sammy Run? (1941)

June 9: The writer

- Sunset Boulevard (Wilder, 1950)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Pat Hobby and Orson Welles”

June 11: Postwar Hollywood

- In a Lonely Place (Ray, 1950)
- Dorothy Hughes, In a Lonely Place

June 16: The fading star

- The Star (1952) / The Artist (Hazanavicius, 2011)
- Rick Altman, Film/Genre (excerpts)

June 18: Hollywood excess

- Maps to the Stars (Cronenberg, 2014) / The Neon Demon (Refn, 2016)
- Bruce Wagner, I’m Losing You

June 23: Hollywood nostalgia and revisionism

- Hail, Caesar! (Coens, 2016) / Once Upon a Time in...Hollywood (Tarantino, 2019) / Hollywood (Ryan Murphy TV show, Netflix, 2020)

June 25: Hollywood in the streaming era

- JD Connor, The Studios After the Studios (excerpts)