

TC521: THEOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE (4 units).

Robert K. Johnston, Professor of Theology and Culture.

DESCRIPTION:

This course will explore (1) modern and post-modern attitudes toward the "spiritual/transcendent/God" found in selected American literature and (2) a variety of means for theological dialogue with these works. Writings by Kesey, Updike, O'Connor, DeVries, Potok, Morrison, Robbins, Kingsolver, and Lamott, as well as selected essays in critical theory will be read. While debunking or listening, symbolizing or secularizing, arguing or affirming, American fiction over the last fifty years is often found interacting with the religious/spiritual currents that pervade our culture. As such, it invites dialogue from a theological perspective.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will be given the opportunity (1) to develop skills in cultural analysis and interaction by engaging in literary interpretation, (2) to explore possible theological approaches to the reading of literature, (3) to consider how literature might be a resource for "reading culture," for spiritual development and discipleship, and for ministry.

RELEVANCE FOR MINISTRY:

Preparation for ministry often assumes students possess skills in cultural analysis and interaction. This course helps students read their "culture" by having them read in their culture. In the process it provides tools and insight for engaged, effective ministry.

COURSE FORMAT:

The class will be conducted on the Internet using a 10-week lesson program aligned with Fuller's academic calendar. The class will have weekly lectures and discussions. One book and an accompanying critical essay will be read and discussed each week.

REQUIRED READING:

- DeVries, Peter. *Blood of the Lamb*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1961
- Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1962
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *Animal Dreams*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1993
- Lamott, Anne. *All New People*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1989
- _____. *Traveling Mercies*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1998
- O'Connor, Flannery. *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1977
- Potok, Chaim. *My Name is Asher Lev*. 1972
- Robbins, Tom. *Another Roadside Attraction*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2004
- Updike, John. *Pigeon Feathers*. Ballantine Books, 1996
- Course Reader of selected critical essays (Morrison, Eliot, Johnston, Lewis, O'Connor, Hansen, TeSelle, hooks, Gunn, Nussbaum). Available in online class

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Weekly threaded discussions (20%)
2. Short précis of each critical essay (10%).
3. Presentation paper to the student's small group on a selected novel/critical essay (10%).
4. Three to five-page critique of Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (20%).
5. Eight to ten-page paper on Lamott's two books (40%).

PREREQUISITES: None.

RELATIONSHIP TO CURRICULUM:

Meets the interdisciplinary course requirement for the MACL in Integrative Studies; the theology and art requirement for the MA in Theology (Theology and Arts format); and specialized requirements for the MA in Worship, Theology, and the Arts, and for the MDiv Concentration in Worship, Theology, and the Arts; Ministry Focus Elective for MAGL program.

FINAL EXAMINATION: None.

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