RS 774: Topics in Religion and Literature

Instructor: Travis Kroeker (UH 117, kroekert@mcmaster.ca)

Tuesday 1:30-3:30 UH 122

Seminar title: **Apocalyptic Confession and the (North) American Novel**

Beginning with Augustine’s *Confessions* and the “confession” of a Lakota holy man, *Black Elk Speaks* we will explore the meaning of apocalyptic confession in the (North) American novel with reference to the following works: Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*; Flannery O’Connor, *The Violent Bear It Away*; Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev*.

Texts:

Augustine, *Confessions* (Maria Boulding or Henry Chadwick translation; I’ll also be exploring the new translation by Sarah Ruden)

*Black Elk Speaks*: *Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, as told through John G. Neihardt (Bison Books; U. of Nebraska Press)

Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (Avenue to Learn)

Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Modern Library)

Flannery O’Connor, *The Violent Bear It Away* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev* (Anchor)

Requirements and Evaluation:

Participation 25 %

Careful reading and preparation of texts is required in order to participate actively in the weekly seminar discussions. Students are expected to respond orally to each seminar presentation, raising points of criticism, alternative interpretation, and questions for discussion.

Seminar presentations 25 %

Students will be responsible for one seminar presentation on an assigned seminar reading. The presentation will interpret its contribution to the seminar topic by focusing on specific passages, providing comparative analysis where relevant, and raising critical, interpretive questions for further discussion. The presentations (10-15 minutes) may be read or presented informally, though an outline at least should be submitted to the instructor. After the presentation seminar participants will respond and the presenter will have opportunity to address and engage the responses. In the final seminar session students will make brief presentations on their essay topics.

Major paper 50 %

A ca. 15-20 page typed double-spaced paper on a topic pertaining to the seminar. Students are encouraged to consult with the professor on their topics. Students will provide a presentation of their research paper topic at the final session. Late papers will be downgraded unless there is a prior agreement with the professor. Due date is **December 21 2018.**

Schedule:

Sept. 11: Intro session,

 18: Augustine, *Confessions*

 25: Augustine, *Confessions*

Oct. 2: *Black Elk Speaks*

 9: Term Break, no seminar

 16: *Black Elk Speaks*

 23: McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

 30: McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

Nov. 6: O’Connor, *Violent Bear It Away*

 13: O’Connor, *Violent Bear It Away*

 20 AAR

 27: Potok, *Asher Lev*

Dec. 4: Potok, *Asher Lev*

Apr. 3: Concluding session: preview of research papers