

RELI-235-DL1: Religion and Literature
Spring 2023 | Tue/Thur 4:30–5:45 pm | ZOOM # 987 3673 4563

Professor James Dooley

Office: Horizon #3100; Phone 703-283-9773; Email: jdooley4@gmu.edu

Office Hours:

In person: Mon/Wed 1:30–3:00 pm

Online: Thursday 1:30–3:00 pm (ZOOM # 961 6949 5225)

or by appointment

The aim of an undergraduate program of studies in religion should be the understanding of religion as one of [our] primary responses to, and expressions of, the human condition. Religion is one of the major means [we possess] for constructing a significant world and for establishing [our] existence by expressing the truth of what it is to be human.

— Jonathan Z. Smith, *On Teaching Religion*

Course Syllabus: Description and Schedule

1. Course Overview

a. Course Description and Purpose

In simplest terms, this course is an introduction to both Religious Studies and to the critical study of Literature. There are lots of different ways of approaching these two worthy projects. The tack that we're going to take this semester is to see how different authors, writing in entirely different genres, work religious themes into their writing to help — themselves? their readers? — come to grips with the “big questions” we all seem to ask ourselves.

But there's a lot more to it than that!

The study of religions and the ways that they are practiced has fascinated students in all walks of life for as far back as you might care to look — people who are interested in people tend also to be interested in how they think, and in what ways they express their beliefs. If it sounds like religion, society, and culture are closely intertwined, then you're hearing me correctly.

We'll be focusing on four modern and semi-modern novels (not “modernist”), including one of the most appreciated science-fiction/fantasy novels of the late 20th Century. We will also read a spiritual autobiography by one of the early Catholic Church Fathers that has influenced Western Civilization for 1500 years and is still going strong!. All of them were written with a popular audience in mind, and these are books you would find in a typical bookstore or library;

they're hardly esoteric scholarly tomes. Along the way, we'll be looking at a few minor poems and some "new journalism," but our emphasis will be on the five books.

The point of all of this is to make us careful readers and critical thinkers. We'll be enjoying the stories, certainly, and we'll be challenged by them. In-class discussions will give us a chance to explore our own ideas as we read. Lectures, assignments, and exams (yes, exams!) are designed to help us all make connections, investigate other ways of thinking, and explore the human condition.

b. Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- i. Analyze a literary author's intent and effectiveness in telling a story
- ii. Identify religious themes used in popular literature and explain their purpose
- iii. Describe the complex relationship between religion and culture in various historical and contemporary contexts

c. Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this class. There is no presupposition that a student has a background in either Religious Studies or in the academic study of literature.

2. Texts and Materials

a. Required Texts

Augustine. *The Confessions*. Translated by Maria Boulding. New City Press, 1997.

Hesse, Hermann. *The Journey to the East*. 1932. Translated by Hilda Rosner. Picador (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux), 1956.

Potok, Chaim. *My Name is Asher Lev*. 1972. Anchor, 2003.

Hansen, Ronald. *Mariette in Ecstasy*. Harper Perennial, 1991.

Card, Orson Scott. *Speaker for the Dead*. Tor, 1991.

b. Other Assigned Readings

Other readings and resources will be available as PDFs on Blackboard.

3. Requirements and Grading (descriptions of the projects appear elsewhere)

Assignment	Value
1. Three short papers, each worth 100 points	300
2. Two in-class presentations, each worth 50 points	100
3. Mid-term exam, scheduled for Tuesday, February 28	200
4. Final Exam, scheduled for Tuesday, May 16	300
5. In-class attendance and participation	100
Total	1,000

	Percentage	Points (out of 1,000)
A	90% – 100%	900 – 1,000 pts.
B	80% – 89%	800–899 pts.
C	70% – 79%	700–799 pts.
D	60% – 69%.	600–699 pts.
F	0% – 59%	0-599 pts

4. Project Descriptions

a. **Short Writing Assignments (3 @ 100 points = 300 possible points)**

You will write three short papers (3 full pages, each) based on specific reading assignments during the semester. These papers will not require additional research beyond the readings, but will ask you to make connections and draw conclusions. Two or three writing prompts will be provided, and you may choose which one to cover. Their respective due-dates are identified on the Course Schedule. Late papers will lose 5 points per day after the assigned due-date, *but late papers will not be accepted after 6 days*. Submit via Blackboard.

b. **In-class Presentations (2 @ 50 points = 100 possible points)**

Students will make two 15-minute in-class presentations based on the scheduled readings for those days. One presentation should be *before* Spring Break (i.e. Jan 31–Mar 9), and one *after* Spring Break (Mar 21–May 2). The choice of topic is up to the student, but it must be germane to the reading for that day. It is expected that the student will (1) set the stage by providing information regarding the topic, (2) guide a discussion, and (3) present at least one passage for the class to examine in depth. More information, and a schedule, will be made available. Start thinking about what books you would like to present on!

c. **Mid-term Exam (200 points)**

The exam will be a mix of identifications, short answers, and at least one essay question. The Mid-term exam will cover *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, *The Journey to the East*, and any other materials covered up to the mid-term.

d. **Final Exam (300 points)**

The final exam will focus primarily on *My Name is Asher Lev*, *Mariette in Ecstasy*, and *Speaker for the Dead*, but will also allow you to draw on all of the material we have studied.

e. **In-Class Attendance and Participation (100+ points possible)**

You can earn up to 5 points per class day, not including exam dates. You are expected to attend and participate fully in all class discussions and activities. There are 27 class meetings, so you are technically able to earn 135 points. Any points earned in excess of 100 will count as extra credit, which would definitely be to many students' advantage.

Absences, or tardiness beyond 30 minutes, will not accrue any points. If you are late to class more than once (after 10 minutes, or if/when I take attendance, whichever is earlier), there will be a loss of 2 points for each lateness thereafter.

5. **Office hours:**

I consider myself dedicated to your success in the class, but not responsible for it. If you think that you are having difficulty, it behooves you to contact me as soon as possible so that we can figure out an approach to solving the problem. The longer you wait, the bigger the problem can become.

My in-person office hours are on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30-3:00 pm. My office is in the Religious Studies complex, Horizon 3148 (enter through 3100). You may appear unannounced and take your chances that I am not meeting with another student, or you can contact me directly beforehand and reserve a spot.

I am also available Thursdays on Zoom between 1:30-3:00 pm. The "virtual door" will be open during those hours, with the same cautions as above.

Outside of class time and office hours, I may or may not be on campus; however, assuming that I'm on-campus, you may appear unannounced *if my office door is open*. It would be wise, however, to schedule a time with me if it is necessary to meet outside of my regular office hours.

You do not need to be facing difficulties in order to visit me and chat! If you are excited about a particular aspect of the course, I would be happy to hear about it. If you want to pursue a line of inquiry, I can probably guide you to some helpful resources.

6. **Course Policies**

a. **Email policies**

All communications by email must use both your and my official "gmu.edu" addresses. The university system occasionally blocks emails from outside of our system, and I must use only your university email address when responding. If you send me an email and it seems as though I haven't responded within 24 hours, please try again, and mention it to me the next time you see me.

b. **Attendance Policies**

i. From the *University Catalog*:

AP.1.6: "Students are expected to attend the class periods of the

courses for which they are registered. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.”

(visit <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/registration-attendance>)

- ii. Absences prevent you from engaging with the material and being part of the classroom learning experience; they will also affect your grade negatively. If you miss more than two consecutive classes, or if there is a significant ongoing situation, you should schedule an appointment with me to discuss what remedies might (or might not) be possible.

c. Adding or dropping classes; withdrawing from classes

- i. Last day to add any classes: Monday, January 30
- ii. Last day to drop with no tuition penalty: Monday, February 6
- iii. Last day to drop with 50% tuition penalty: Monday, February 13
- iv. Last day to drop with full tuition liability – Monday, February 27
(visit <https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/withdrawal> for information)
- v. Selective Withdrawal Period: February 28 – Monday, April 3
(visit <https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/withdrawal/selective>)
- vi. Non-academic withdrawals (situations must be verifiable)
(<https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/withdrawal/non-academic>)

d. Class Cancellation / Inclement Weather Policy

If the university is closed due to inclement weather, classes are cancelled. In some instances, the university imposes only a delayed opening; only those classes which would have completed before that specified time are cancelled. In other instances, the university might close early, in which case classes in session will end at the appointed time, and all later classes are cancelled.

Online classes are a special category, and we will follow any directives from the university.

Any assignments that are to be submitted on Blackboard remain due in accordance with the syllabus, regardless of whether or not the university is closed for whatever reason.

I strongly encourage you to keep to the reading schedule. In the event that the schedule must be adjusted, I will provide updated material, but we should be able to adjust our discussions without undue hardship.

In some years past, the university has chosen to cancel “Reading Day” in order for classes to hold make-up sessions lost to inclement weather. I will keep you advised of anything I learn in this regard.

7. Format for written assignments

Any written assignments are to be submitted as attachments in the “assignments” section for our course in Blackboard.

Unless otherwise indicated, assignments should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with standard one-inch margins. Do not insert extra spacing or blank lines between paragraphs or before and after block quotations, charts, or other graphics. On the top left of the *first page only* of each assignment, include your name, the course number and the professor’s name, and the date submitted. Include a rhetorically purposeful title centered at the head of the assignment. Pages should be numbered at the top right of each page and should include your last name in the header.

In all your written work, format and citations must follow a consistent accepted style, preferably either MLA or Chicago. You remain responsible for correctly-formatted and bibliographically accurate citations and so should not rely on citation generators.

8. Technology

a. Electronic materials and reading assignments

You will need internet access for several purposes for this class: to access the course folder in Blackboard, to access assigned readings, to conduct online research, and to submit quizzes and reports. For electronic material, you should access and download or print out any required readings before they are needed for class, so that you can get assistance if you run into any trouble along the way. (“Inability to access the material in time” is really not an acceptable excuse for failure to do the assigned reading, except in exceptional circumstances.)

b. In-class use of electronic devices

Make certain that you have internet access and sufficient bandwidth to participate over Zoom. Don’t wait until the last minute before class starts to start the Zoom program — I have been unhappily surprised in the past when Zoom has refused to proceed unless it updates the software.

Please keep your camera on during class, but keep your microphone on mute unless you are addressing the class. Please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class. Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism and may affect your participation grade.

9. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and violations of academic integrity contravene the GMU Honor Code and will be submitted to the Office of Academic Integrity for disciplinary action. I include here a statement from the University about academic integrity: *"The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification."*

Regarding the issue of plagiarism, in particular: scholarly work, like other cultural

discourses, works by building on, re-assessing, re-inflecting, scrutinizing, and critiquing other people's work. It involves a dialogic exchange. But this exchange also requires that you do not claim credit for things you borrow or adopt from others, even though the uses you put them to may be your own. So, when you use language (phrasing), ideas, or information that you gleaned from somewhere else, give appropriate credit. This applies even if you paraphrase those ideas or information into your own words. The challenge is to ensure that your work is not entirely derivative: you accomplish this, not by trying to hide your debts to others, but by making sure you do not simply rehearse what others have researched, thought, and written.

10. Conduct in Class Spaces

a. GMU Nondiscrimination Policy

“George Mason University is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital status, pregnancy status or genetic information. George Mason University shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.

“The University is dedicated to ensuring access, fairness and equity for minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, and veterans (as covered by law) in its educational programs, related activities and employment. George Mason University shall thus maintain a continuing affirmative action program to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices in every phase of university operations.

“Any employee who becomes aware of sexual harassment or other potentially discriminatory behavior must contact Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics.

“Retaliation against an individual who has raised claims of illegal discrimination or has cooperated with an investigation of such claims is prohibited.”

b. GMU Diversity Statement

“George Mason is committed to excellence and integrity in all its endeavors. The university’s reputation is one of its most valuable assets, and members of the community should not place personal interests above the best interests of the university; even the appearance of impropriety must be avoided.”

c. GMU Statement on Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence

“George Mason University is committed to providing a safe learning, living and working environment free from discrimination. The University’s environment is meant to be experienced as vibrant and dynamic, and one that includes ample opportunities for exploration of self, identity and independence. Sexual misconduct and incidents of interpersonal violence deeply interrupt that experience, and George Mason University is committed to a campus that is free of these types of incidents in order to promote community well-being and student success.

“George Mason University encourages individuals who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek

assistance and support.

“Confidential resources are available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.gmu.edu), Student Health Services (shs.gmu.edu), the University Ombudsperson (ombudsman.gmu.edu), and Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education and Services (waves.gmu.edu).

“All other members of the University community (except those noted above) are not considered confidential resources and are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator.”

d. Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office (<http://ods.gmu.edu>) and must be identified at the start of the semester.

11. The University Writing Center opens on Monday, January 30

The University Writing Center (located in the Johnson Center, Room 227-E, in the Lab for Writing and Communication) is a free writing resource for students. Visit their website (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>) to learn about their hours and services, and to use the online scheduler. *Sessions are offered in person and online.* Tutors will not proofread your writing, but they will help you to develop revision and editing strategies. Please note: if you have difficulty writing grammatical English, I may *require* you to meet regularly with a tutor at the Writing Center.

12. Although it is unlikely, this syllabus, like any other, may be subject to change

I will notify you in class, on Blackboard, and via GMU email, if any of the policies outlined in the syllabus need to be modified, or if the course schedule must be updated.

13. Course Schedule

WEEK 1: Course Introduction; Basic Concepts for studying Religion and Literature	
Class #1: Tues, Jan 24	Discussion Topic: Introduction and Course Overview Assignments: Browse the Blackboard site. Acquire a copy of the texts. Read Arthur Krystal’s article, “What is Literature?” and T.S. Eliot’s poem, “Journey of the Magi,” for Thursday. Do an internet search for Eliot’s poem and make a few notes. Bring your ideas.
Class #2: Thur, Jan 26	Discussion Topic: What is religion? What is literature? Assignments: Start reading <i>Confessions</i> by Saint Augustine for Tuesday.
CONFESSIONS, BY SAINT AUGUSTINE	
WEEK 2	
Class #3: Tues, Jan 31	<i>Confessions</i> (Introduction and Book 1) — available as PDF files
Class #4: Thur, Feb 2	<i>Confessions</i> (Books 2, 3, and 4)

WEEK 3	
Class #5: Tues, Feb 7	<i>Confessions</i> (Books 5 and 6)
Class #6: Thur, Feb 9	<i>Confessions</i> (Book 7) • Prompts will be provided for Paper # 1, due Feb 16
WEEK 4	
Class #7: Tues, Feb 14	<i>Confessions</i> (Book 8) — we will not be reading Books 9 and 10
<i>THE JOURNEY TO THE EAST, BY HERMANN HESSE</i>	
Class #8: Thur, Feb 16	Assignment Due: Paper # 1 due before class (Blackboard) <i>Journey to the East</i> (Part 1)
WEEK 5	
Class #9: Tues, Feb 21	<i>Journey to the East</i> (Parts 2, 3, and 4)
Class #10: Thur, Feb 23	<i>Journey to the East</i> (Part 5)
WEEK 6	
Class #11: Tues, Feb 28	MID-TERM EXAM 4:30–5:45 pm (Regular Class Period)
<i>MY NAME IS ASHER LEV, BY CHAIM POTOK</i>	
Class #12: Thur, Mar 2	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 1, Chapter 1)
WEEK 7	
Class #13: Tues, Mar 7	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 1, Chapters 2 and 3)
Class #14: Thur, Mar 9	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 1, Chapters 4 and 5)
WEEK 8	
No Class Tue, Mar 14	SPRING BREAK — NO CLASS
No Class Thur, Mar 16	SPRING BREAK — NO CLASS
WEEK 9	
Class #15: Tues, Mar 21	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 2, Chapters 6 and 7)
Class #16: Thur, Mar 23	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 2, Chapters 8 and 9) • Prompts will be provided for Paper # 2, due April 4
WEEK 10	
Class #17: Tues, Mar 28	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 3, Chapters 10, 11, and 12)
Class #18: Thur, Mar 30	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> (Book 3, Chapters 13 and 14)

MARIETTE IN ECSTASY, BY RON HANSEN	
WEEK 11	
Class #19: Tues, Apr 4	Assignment Due: Paper # 2 due before class (Blackboard) <i>Mariette in Ecstasy</i> (Part 1)
Class #20: Thur, Apr 6	<i>Mariette in Ecstasy</i> (Part 2)
WEEK 12	
Class #21: Tues, Apr 11	<i>Mariette in Ecstasy</i> (Part 3)
SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD, BY ORSON SCOTT CARD	
Class #22: Thur, Apr 13	<i>Speaker for the Dead</i> (Introduction, Prologue, and Chapters 1 and 2)
WEEK 13	
Class #23: Tues, Apr 18	<i>Speaker for the Dead</i> (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6)
Class #24: Thur, Apr 20	<i>Speaker for the Dead</i> (Chapters 7, 8, and 9) • Prompts will be provided for Paper # 3, due May 4
WEEK 14	
Class #25: Tues, Apr 25	<i>Speaker for the Dead</i> (Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13)
Class #26: Thur, Apr 27	<i>Speaker for the Dead</i> (Chapters 14, 15, and 16)
WEEK 15	
Class #27: Tues, May 2	<i>Speaker for the Dead</i> (Chapters 17 and 18)
Class #28: Thur, May 4	Assignment Due: Short Paper # 3 due before class (Blackboard) — LAST DAY OF CLASS

BE AWARE OF THESE ADDITIONAL DATES	
* Tues, May 9	This is scheduled as a “Reading Day” (no classes), but if inclement weather forces the cancellation of classes during the semester, as it has in some of the past years, the university may extend classes through this date. If this happens, we will modify the Class Schedule accordingly.
Tues, May 16	FINAL EXAM 4:30–7:15 pm