

## CORE 301: Modes of Inquiry

Professor William Handley

### **Sex, Church, and State**

This course will explore how and why the “natural” and the “national” come together in culture, religion, and law to regulate sex and define gender, often through heterosexual marriage. This conjoining of nature and nation through various cultural and religious assumptions has often complicated the meanings of religion and sex, and of what counts as “good” forms of either.

By exploring and historicizing instances of traditional and non-traditional marital forms – heterosexual monogamy, polygamy, and gay marriage – we will at the same time explore the contingent meanings of such terms as “religion,” “nation,” “law,” and the “natural.”

One of the central questions of the course is: why has marriage been considered “the cornerstone of civilization” and why have other forms as vastly different as same-sex and polygamous marriage been deemed a potentially fatal threat to civilization itself? In exploring this question, we will examine the relationships among private property, sexuality, and religion – and how they are manifest in everything from clothing to war-making.

As we read and view across genres – court decisions, theory, novels, films, among them – one of the central aims of the course will be to explore how different kinds of discourse and forms of representation reveal and conceal the cultural relationships between private and public, between sexuality and law, and between marriage and nation, relationships that these discourses and representations also serve to construct, reinforce, or remake.

#### **Texts & Films**

*American Beauty*. Dir. Sam Mendes (1999).

*Brokeback Mountain*. Dir. Ang Lee (2005).

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Part I* (Vintage, 1990)

Zane Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (Modern Library, 2002)

Andrew Sullivan, ed., *Same-Sex Marriage Pro & Con: A Reader* (Vintage, Rev. ed., 2004)

*Thelma and Louise*. Dir. Ridley Scott (1991).

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (Collector’s Library, 2010)

Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (Dover Thrift Edition, 2006)

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Mariner Books, Annotated ed., 2006)

Course Reader