

## **Outcasts, Scapegoats, and Fallen Heroes: Can They Help Us Make the World a Better Place?**

**Led by Dr. Bill Monroe**

History and literature provide us with countless stories of individuals and groups who are excluded, cast out, or otherwise relegated to the margins. In fact, strategies of exclusion are so widespread that ostracizing the weak or the strong who become vulnerable seems to be inherent in our DNA, and social media has only made the practice more efficient and widespread.

Assuming that we want and need more inclusive communities and a world where division is less the norm, what can certain stories, poems, novels, plays, and films reveal about such habits and practices, conscious and unconscious? And, having deeper understanding and informed empathy, how can we replace fear and persecution with love and mercy?

This new institute is going to be *fun* and we don't want to be too grim! My teacher liked to say, let's be serious but not solemn. So I'll ask my seminar participants to watch *Mean Girls* before we meet on June 21 and think about the "Burn Book" in that hilarious movie: what are the serious takeaways inherent in the comedy? Also, we'll want to listen to John Prine's ballad, "[A Town This Size](#)" (a duet sung by Prine and Dolores Keane). After watching and listening, our first read will be *The Scarlet Letter*, and we will review the Hester Prynne chapters in that classic American novel on Day 1.

At that point it would be interesting to go back in time and learn a bit about some ancient ideas, practices, and examples of those who are "made" scapegoats or come into the world as "others" because of their social status, appearance, or disability. The Greek word for these figures is *pharmakoi*, which can mean medication—hence the English word *pharmacy*—or poison or scapegoat. Early in our time together we will also get acquainted with some psychological and social motivations for these modes of exclusion using some ideas of Ren Girard developed in a book called *Wanting* by Luke Burgis.

After laying the groundwork, we will read and discuss a number of works that feature characters and plots about outcasts and fallen heroes, about exclusion, ostracism, and—eventually and hopefully—self- and social-awareness, flourishing, and redemption. Participants will form groups and each group will be responsible for leading discussion, role-playing, or other activities on a given day. We will also invite a couple of guests: Ted Estess, who was a friend and biographer of Holocaust survivor [Elie Wiesel](#), and Martin Siegel, whose recent book [Judgement and Mercy](#) is a biography of Justice Irving Kaufman, the judge who condemned the Rosenbergs but later became a champion of desegregation, free speech, and victims of politically motivated persecution such as John Lennon. The last day, June 28, will be performance day for all three seminars wherein we communicate with our colleagues what we have been learning and doing over the course of the institute. In early June we will meet briefly online to make final selections of the works we want to watch, read, study, and discuss. The following are suggested texts with the definites in bold.

**Tina Fey, *Mean Girls* (movie)**

**Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (excerpts)**

***Leviticus* 16, 21-2**

***Isaiah* 53, 1-12**

**Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus***

Flannery O'Connor, "The Displaced Person"

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*

Ivy Meeropol, *Heir to an Execution: A Granddaughters Story* (documentary film)

Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery"

Albert Camus, *The Stranger*

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "The Scapegoat"

Toni Morrison, *Sula*

Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*