

***In the Lake of the Woods* – Tim O’Brien**

On a lake deep in Minnesota’s north woods, John and Kathy Wade are trying to reassemble their lives. John, a rising political star, has just suffered a devastating electoral defeat. Kathy attempts to comfort her husband, but it soon becomes apparent that something is horribly between them, that they have hidden too much from each other. Then one day Kathy vanishes. Their boat is gone – did she drown or is she lost? Or did she flee, disappearing into a new life? As a massive search gets under way, the possibilities multiply in terrifying directions. Uncovering the truth requires an investigation of Wade’s life, and gradually we come to see that he is a sorcerer lost inside his own magic, a Houdini capable of escaping everything but the chains of his darkest secret.

Reviews:

Library Journal 6/15/94

New York Times Books of the Century

Tim O’Brien is the winner of the National Book Award for *Going After Cacciato* (1978)

Content:

As John Wade questions his sanity, his morality, his duty as a soldier and the basic goodness or evil of humanity, he has a crisis of faith. During his dark nights of the soul, he sometimes yells, “Kill Jesus” in the throes of his angst. Some students are, understandably, offended. However, this motif, a character questioning or challenging God, is a common one in literature (Christ himself does it on the cross.) Class discussion of why this motif is so prevalent in literature and in history is often lively. The book has many scenes from the Vietnam War. In those scenes, both vulgar language and graphic description of violence may upset some. Still, this realism can lead to a beneficial exploration of what war does to people.