

Women and Religion in Popular US Fiction

UF Quest 1/Identities IDS2935

General Education: Humanities, Diversity

[Note: A minimum grade of C is required for General Education credit]

Spring 2022, MW 4:05-4:55, Friday sections

Class resources, announcements, updates, & assignments will be made available through the class Canvas site:

Our Zoom link: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/96029556307>

Instructor	Teaching Assistant
Rachel Gordan, Assistant Prof. of Religious Studies and Center for Jewish Studies rgordan@ufl.edu Office Hours: By appointment	Chris Lomelin EMAIL: lomelince@ufl.edu Office hours: by appointment

The complete course information: <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/416290>

Required Books

Mary Gordon, *Good Boys and Dead Girls: And Other Essays*

Elaine Pagels, *Why Religion?*

Marilyn French, *The Women's Room*

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Women and religion have played central roles in American popular fiction since the terms “America” and “fiction” came into popular use in the 18th century. Women have always been the bulk of the fiction-reading public; novels that treat religious life have waxed and waned in popularity, but have always been what publishers call “steady sellers.” This was particularly true in the mid-20th century. After World War 2, many women who had moved into the paid workforce during the War returned to the domestic sphere, and mainstream religions (Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism) assumed a new centrality in public discourse as Americans reckoned with the horrors of the Holocaust and the atom bomb. TV, with its seemingly unlimited possibilities of genre and subject-matter, was only just becoming a staple of the middle-class home. In this “golden age” of American literature, fiction captured the centrality of gender and religion in society.

This course is **organized chronologically and in spring 2022 it will be focused on “Judeo-Christian” religions** (that is a term we’ll examine together). We’ll examine best-selling fictions dealing with women and religion, first in the immediate post-WW2 period and then in the late 20th century, as the popular culture pendulum swung in a more secular and, for women, “liberated” direction. Emphasis is placed on understanding works in historical context as well as on critical self-reflection; students are invited to understand how, like the authors they study, their own position as people with specific gender identities and relationships to religious practice (including being a non-religious person) affects what and how they read. One of the big questions we’ll be asking is: how do changing ideas about gender and religion and pluralism find expression in American popular literature. **In spring 2022, we’ll be focused on Jews and Christians.**

Class Comportment

This class deals with historical dimensions of American life that may be new and/or uncomfortable, including slavery, anti-Semitism, sexism, homosexuality, and the nature and place of religion in public

Gordan/Syllabus: /1

life. If we all knew everything there is to know about these topics and agreed on all of them there wouldn't really be much point to having this class. At the same time, there is also not much point to having the class if we each see it as an opportunity to grandstand about our beliefs and browbeat those who don't share them. Classroom discussion works best when it is both frank and respectful—sometimes a hard balance to strike. In this class you may need to separate your personal (intuitive, gut-level) feelings from your best rational mind in order to follow an idea through, see it from different angles, and give consideration to its complexity. If we all do that, we may find surprising common ground for agreement or—also useful—respectful and productive ways to disagree.

This syllabus details the work you need to do for each day's class.

- Assignments are due through the Canvas assignment function unless otherwise noted.
- Readings should be completed-- before class begins.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH PROFESSOR: *Your emails should be addressed to Professor Gordan (not Mrs., not Ms., not Miss). If you do not hear back from Professor Gordan within five days, please feel free to send a friendly follow-up email. If you have a question about your grade, **please wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before emailing the professor with you question.***

We will taking advantage of our virtual reality by having a number of guests visits, including two of the novelists whose work we are reading.

Assignments/Grading breakdown

Weekly Section Assignment	10%
Participation	10%
Section participation grade	5%
Fill in the syllabus assignment	20%
Two essays	35%
MW class attendance	10%
2 Experiential learning assignments	10%

Note: Course Content is Subject to Change – Professor Gordan will let you know if there are changes

WOMEN, RELIGION AND POPULAR FICTION

W JAN 5TH What do we know about this topic? What is Literature For?

Morrison, [“Men and Women Don't Read From Same Page On Books”](#) (2017)

Maher, [“Oprah Books and New Socially-Conscious Zeitgeist”](#) (2017)

Pew Center for Religion & Public Life, [US Public Becoming Less Religious”](#) (2015)

M Jan 10th *Civil Religion, American Religion? Judeo-Christianity*

For today, read: Robert Bellah reading (225-229)

W Jan 12 Robert Bellah, for today, read: Bella, 230-234

M Jan 17. MLK Day

W Jan 19. *What does it mean to be popular?*

Emily Nussbaum, *I Like to Watch* excerpt (Canvas)

Tracy Fessenden, Introduction to *Culture and Redemption* (2007; available through Canvas E-res page)

read from start of chapter through “cultural authority” on p. 6

1940s and 1950s

****Me and My Methodology Reflection paper due: Sunday Jan 23rd*

M Jan 24 *Gentleman's Agreement*
 W Jan 26 *Gentleman's Agreement*
 M Jan 31 *All of a Kind Family*
 W Feb 2 *All of a Kind Family*
 M Feb 7 *Marjorie Morningstar*
 1960s-1970s
 W Feb 9 Guest speaker Maggie Doherty, *The Equivalents*
 M Feb 14 Marilyn French, *The Women's Room*, chapters 1-12
 W Feb 16 *The Women's Room*, Chapter 13-21
 ***first paper due: Sunday Feb 20th
 M Feb 21 *The Women's Room*, Chap 21 – Part II, chap 9. (P. 52-82)
 1980s AND 1990s
 W Feb 23 Don DeLillo reading
 M Feb 28 Prof. Brenna Moore, Mary Gordon
 21ST CENTURY
 W Mar 2 Elaine Pagels, *Why Religion*, 1st 10 pages
 M Mar 14 *Why Religion*, read to page 140
 W Mar 16 *Why Religion*, to page 155
 ***Second paper due: Sunday March 20th
 M Mar 21 Finish *Why Religion*?
 W Mar 23 *Saints for All Occasions*
 W Mar 28 *Saints for all Occasions*
 W Mar 30 *Saints for All Occasions*
 M Apr 4th *Saints for all Occasions*
 W Apr 6 *Saints for all Occasions*
 M Apr 11 Presentations
 W Apr 13 Presentations
 M April 18 Presentations
 W April 20 Presentations

ASSIGNED WORK

In order to give students flexibility and to spread grading out evenly over the term, short papers allow students to choose when/on what text they will write. In the first week of class, students will select the texts on which they will write the Historical Context and Literary Analysis papers and commit to the due dates associated with those texts. The Experiential Learning paper has a floating due date but must be completed before the workload of the course increases in the last month.

- Me and My Methodology Paper (10 points, 10%)
 - Informal/creative **500-600-word** essay (outlining and explaining the student's typical interpretive framework for reading fiction, with attention to ways gender and religious belief (and/or lack thereof) impacts personal critical practice
 - **Due: Sunday, Jan 23rd, by midnight**
- Experiential Learning 1: religion/JST Talk Attendance and Report (5 pts)
 - Students will attend one zoom religion/JST talk and write a 300-400 word-report on the talk. Reports should address whether and how the speaker address gender and religion in the talk.
- Experiential Learning 2: Author Maggie Doherty talk (5 pts) Author Maggie Doherty <https://scholar.harvard.edu/mdoherty/home> will join us on Feb 9th, to discuss her recent book, *The Equivalents* about women writers and artists
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/books/review/the-equivalents-by-maggie-doherty-an->

[excerpt.html](#) Please submit a 300-word write-up about the talk, explaining 1) how it changed your understanding of women writers/artists during this time.

- Two analytical essays, based on our readings (10 and 20 points, 30%) **Feb 20th and Mar 20th**
 - The prompts for these 950-1200-word essays will be available 3-4 weeks before the due date on CANVAS.
- Fill-in-the-Syllabus assignment (15 points) Find a popular book that deals with women and/or religion to add to our chronological syllabus. This can be a children's, young adult, or adult novel, it can be from any era from the 1940s to now. You will need to include analysis of 2-3 reviews of this book, so make sure you can find reviews of your book before committing to it. This assignment includes both a 5-8-minute oral presentation/pitch (you're trying to convince the rest of us that this book should be included) that explains what this book offers (5%), in terms of its women and/or religion perspective AND an 800-word reflection (10 points) that puts your chosen book in conversation with one of our current readings (15%). *The presentation part of this assignment may be done in groups (if you choose to work on the same book). The paper component is to be done, individually.*
- Participation (10 points, 10%)
 - Consistent alert (i.e., awake and paying attention), informed (i.e., shows evidence of having done assigned work), thoughtful (i.e., shows evidence of having understood and considered issues raised in readings and other discussions), and considerate (i.e., takes the perspectives of others into account) participation.
 - If you have personal issues that prohibit you from joining freely in class discussion, e.g., shyness, language barriers, etc., see the instructor as soon as possible to discuss alternative modes of participation.
- Attendance (10 points, 10%)
 - Consistent, on-time, all-class period attendance, two absences allowed). Chris Lomelin will be keeping track of attendance
- Section attendance (10 points) and participation (5 points), 15%

Total Possible Points: 100 (Point values are a fraction off 100% due to rounding)

Grading

- Participation Grading: Consistent high-quality class participation—in large and small groups—is expected. “High-quality” in this case means
 - informed (i.e., shows evidence of having done assigned work),
 - thoughtful (i.e., shows evidence of having understood and considered issues raised in readings and other discussions), and
 - considerate (i.e., takes the perspectives of others into account).

If you have personal issues that prohibit you from joining freely in class discussion, e.g., shyness, language barriers, etc., see the instructor as soon as possible to discuss alternative modes of participation.

- Paper Grading: It is not truly possible to separate the quality of ideas from the quality of the language through which they are expressed, but I attempt to do so by using the grading rubrics for papers. These grids assign point values to each of five levels of achievement (A-F), then assess what level you have reached in each of four areas: Content (the thoughtfulness, originality, and insight of the paper), Development (its organization and movement from one idea to another), Style (the appropriateness and effectiveness of the language), and Usage (mechanics of grammar, spelling, citation, formatting, and punctuation).

	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Adequate (C)	Poor (D)	Failing (F)	
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Content	Significant controlling idea or assertion supported with concrete, substantial, and relevant evidence.	Controlling idea or assertion supported with concrete and relevant evidence.	Controlling idea or assertion general, limited, or obvious; some supporting evidence is repetitious, irrelevant, or sketchy.	Controlling idea or assertion too general, superficial, or vague; evidence insufficient because obvious, aimless, or contradictory.	No discernible idea or assertion controls the random or unexplained details that make up the body of the essay.
Development	Order reveals a sense of necessity, symmetry, and emphasis; paragraphs focused and coherent; logical transitions reinforce the progress of the analysis or argument. Introduction engages initial interest; conclusion supports without repeating.	Order reveals a sense of necessity and emphasis; paragraphs focused and coherent; logical transitions signal changes in direction; introduction engages initial interest; conclusion supports without merely repeating.	Order apparent but not consistently maintained; paragraphs focused and for the most part coherent; transitions functional but often obvious or monotonous. Introduction or conclusions may be mechanical rather than purposeful or insightful.	Order unclear or inappropriate, failing to emphasize central idea; paragraphs jumbled or underdeveloped; transitions unclear, inaccurate, or missing. Introduction merely describes what is to follow; conclusion merely repeats what has been said.	Order and emphasis indiscernible; paragraphs typographical rather than structural; transitions unclear, inaccurate, or missing. Neither the introduction nor the conclusion satisfies any clear rhetorical purpose.
Style	Sentences varied, emphatic, and purposeful; diction fresh, precise, economical, and idiomatic; tone complements the subject, conveys the authorial persona, and suits the audience.	Sentences varied, purposeful, and emphatic; diction precise and idiomatic; tone fits the subject, persona, and audience.	Sentences competent but lacking emphasis and variety; diction generally correct and idiomatic; tone acceptable for the subject.	Sentences lack necessary emphasis, subordination, and purpose; diction vague or unidiomatic; tone inconsistent with or inappropriate to the subject.	Incoherent, rudimentary, or redundant sentences thwart the meaning of the essay; diction nonstandard or unidiomatic; tone indiscernible or inappropriate to the subject.
Usage	Grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling adhere to the conventions of "edited American English."	Grammar, punctuation, syntax, and spelling contain no serious deviations from the conventions of "edited American English."	Content undercut by some deviations from the conventions of "edited American English."	Frequent mistakes in grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling obscure content.	Frequent and serious mistakes in grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling make the content unintelligible.

The grade you receive on formal written work is the sum of the points you got in each area. (Point values at each letter grade level vary depending on total point value of assignment.) Written comments on your papers add detail to and help to explain the numerical score you receive in each of the four areas.

Grading Scale

I record your points on all assignments over the course of the semester in the Canvas gradebook, which translates total points into a letter grade using a standard grading scale:

A= 94-100% of points possible	A- =90-93%	
B+=87-89%;	B=84-86%	B- =80-83%
C+=77-79%	C=74-76%	C- =70-73%
D+=67-69%	D=64-66%	D- =60-63%
<60=F		

More information on UF grading policy is [available here](#).

Policies

Class Attendance

Class attendance is expected. Students are allowed five discretionary absences (see “Attendance” under “Graded Work” above) to cover excused and unexcused absences. Additional absences that meet the standard of “excused” per [UF’s policies](#) may be allowed, otherwise each absence beyond five will result in two points off of the final grade.

Making Up Work

Work is due as specified in the syllabus. Late work is subject to a 1/3 grade penalty for each 24 hour period it is late (e.g., a paper that would’ve earned an A if turned in in class on Monday becomes an A- if received Tuesday, a B+ if received Wednesday, etc., with the weekend counting as two days). To be excused from submitting work or taking an exam at the assigned time, you must give 24 hours advance notice and/or meet the UF standards for an excused absence.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing UF’s standard [online evaluations](#) (summary results will be available to students [here](#)) as well as a course-specific evaluation that focuses on course content and the experience of the Quest curriculum. Class time will be allocated for the completion of both evaluations.

Class Demeanor

Students are expected to arrive to class on time, stay the full class period, and behave in a manner that is respectful to the instructor and to fellow students. Electronic devices should be turned off and placed in closed bags. Opinions held by other students should be respected in discussion, and conversations that do not contribute to the discussion should be kept to a minimum.

Materials and Supplies Fees

There are no additional fees for this course.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 302 Tigert Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

