

## 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 2021, MW 5:10-6:00, Friday sections

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

Our Zoom link: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/96691078767?pwd=MXRiMUFrWFErZzNuZENtQ243cE4rQT09>

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

Required Books (available at UF Bookstore):

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

Yaa Gyasi, *Transcendent Kingdom*

### **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 18<sup>th</sup> 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-20<sup>th</sup> 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 examines best-selling fictions dealing with women and religion, first in the immediate post-WW2 period and then in the late 20<sup>th</sup> 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

### **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 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 your 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

Participation: 15%

Final Paper 20%

Midterm essay 15%

Quizzes 10%

Section Participation Grade 5%

Section assignment 10%

Advertisement for Your book 15%

Author questions: 10%

**Note: Course Content is Tentative and Subject to Change**

## Introduction

### WEEK 1 MEN AND WOMEN, RELIGION AND FICTION

M JAN 11TH 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)
- W Jan 13th Civil Religion, American Religion?
- Robert Bellah religion handout in class

## Unit One: History and Theory Toolbox

### WEEK 2 INTRODUCTIONS AND PROTOCOLS

W Jan 20 Jane Tompkins, excerpt from Sensational Designs on Course Reserves

- 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

WEEK 3 THE WASP LADY CANON AND THE BEGINNING OF JEWISH BESTSELLERS

M Jan 25. Professor Lori Harrison Kahan,

W Jan 27. Bible event with Professor Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler

WEEK 4

M Feb 1 Anzia Yezierska: "a world where ambition was the path to Americanization and ambition seemed designed for men.

Alice Kessler Introduction  
*Bread Givers* (1925), 1-23

W Feb 3 How and where we find inspiration in these words: "Cooking with Anzia Yezierska"  
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/04/12/cooking-with-anzia-yezierska/>  
"Shopping for Simplicity"

- *Bread Givers*, 24-52

WEEK 5

EDNA FERBER

M Feb 8 *A Peculiar Treasure* (1938)  
Chapters 1-3

W Feb 10 *A Peculiar Treasure*, chapters 4-5

WEEK 6 M Feb 15. Laura Hobson, excerpts from *Gentleman's Agreement* (available through Canvas E-res page)

- Chpts. 1-3
  - Screening of *Gentleman's Agreement*, 5 pm. Location TBA
- Students unable to attend the screening should watch the entire film on their own through a streaming service or in Library West, where it is available on closed reserve.

W Feb 17 Writing workshop

WEEK 7

BEYOND LIBERALISM (AND DOMESTICITY)

M Feb 22 Catholic woman writers

Jane Trahey, *Life with Mother Superior* (New York: FSG, 1962), 1-27.

## Unit 3: The Post-Postwar World

W Feb 24 Are you there God? Judy Blume

WEEK 8

M Mar 1 <https://jwa.org/podcasts/canwetalk/episode-41-coming-age-judy-blume>  
Song of Solomon - read

W Mar 3 Song of Solomon

WEEK 9

M Mar 8 Song of Solomon

W Mar 10. Song of Solomon

WEEK 10

M Mar 15 *Preparing for Sabbath*, by Nessa Rappaport and in-class author visit

W Mar 17. Song of Solomon

WEEK 11

MY HEAVEN

M Mar 22 Professor Sasha Senderovich guest lecture  
(Start reading *Transcendent Kingdom* if you haven't already ☺)

W Mar 24 Recharge Day

WEEK 12

M Mar 29 *Transcendent Kingdom*  
Chapters 1-14

**For class today: Please have your two reviews for your final essay on hand**

W Mar 31 *Transcendent Kingdom*  
Chapters 15-19

WEEK 13

M Apr 5 *Transcendent Kingdom*  
Chapters 20-28

W Apr 7 Chapters 29-36

In-class writing workshop

For class today: Please have draft of opening paragraph with outline of what is to come (may be in bullet points)

WEEK 14

M Apr 12 **Yaa Gyasi** *Transcendent Kingdom*

W Apr 14 Group plugs

Week 15

WINDING DOWN

M Apr 19 Group plugs

**ASSIGNED WORK (NOTE: YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL THE ASSIGNED WORK IN ORDER TO PASS THE CLASS)**

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: Monday, Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5 pm**
- Religion Talk Attendance and Report (15 points, 15%)
  - Students will attend one of two Religion talks on the syllabus 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.
  - **Due: Monday, Sept 16<sup>th</sup>, 5 pm and Mon, Nov 18<sup>th</sup> 5 pm**
- Mid-term In-Class Exam (20 points, 20%) **Tuesday October 1st**
  - In-class exam; short answer, fill-in-the-blanks/multiple choice and short essay questions
- Experiential Learning Myla Goldberg Essay (15 points, 15%)
  - 750-1000 word report on the **Myla Goldberg Wed, Nov 13<sup>th</sup>, 12:30 talk** (Judaica Library), describing it and linking it to themes and topics treated in class.
  - **Due: Wed, Nov 27<sup>th</sup>.**
- In-class Final Exam (short-answer questions and essay questions, 20 points, 20%)
  - Synthetic essays drawing on the material covered in the semester. Questions distributed in class.
- 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, .38 points per 26 class meetings, 10%)
  - Consistent, on-time, all-class period attendance

**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)
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/](http://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.

### **Grading Scale**

Points awarded on assigned work will be recorded 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](#). A complete discussion of course policies is available on the class Canvas site, at the page "Course Administration and Policies."

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