

**Religion 387A: Gender, Body, and Religion**  
**Professor Melissa M. Wilcox**  
**TThF 11:00-11:50, Olin 161**  
**Whitman College**  
**Fall 2004**

Office: Olin 310  
Office phone: 527-5247  
E-mail: wilcoxmm@whitman.edu

Office hours: M & W 1:00-3:00  
Spring coffee hours: Tu & Th 8:00-8:45 am

**Course description:**

Gender and the human body are nearly ubiquitous in religion. They are evident in images of the divine or in a religion's refusal to image the divine; in the control and maintenance of the body through asceticism, sexual regulations, dietary restrictions, and other practices; in debates over human nature and reality; in questions of clothing, leadership, and rites of passage; and in many other areas. Over the past fifteen years, studies of gender and the body have multiplied within the field of religious studies, but much more remains to be done. This class has two goals: to explore some of the work that has been done to date, and to consider new ways in which theories on gender and the body can be applied to religion.

**Required texts:**

- Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- Nancy Tuana, William Cowling, Maurice Hamington, Greg Johnson, and Terrance MacMullan, eds., *Revealing Male Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
- Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
- L. Dean Allen, *Rise Up, O Men of God: The "Men and Religion Forward Movement" and the "Promise Keepers"* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2002).
- Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Helen Hardacre, *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

All books will be on reserve in Penrose.

## Course requirements:

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Response papers: 5 @ 5 % each.....	25 %
Discussant presentations: 3 @ 10 % each.....	30%
Presentation of final project.....	10 %
Final project.....	25 %
Class participation.....	10 %

*Response papers:* Over the course of the semester, you will need to turn in five 1- to 2-page response papers. Although you may choose the readings you respond to, each paper is due on the day we discuss that reading. Late response papers will not be accepted, and you may only turn in one paper per day. For each paper, choose one of the reading selections (chapters or articles) for the day. Head the paper with a one-sentence summary of the author's thesis, or main point—use a single-sentence quotation if you can find one, or paraphrase using your own words. Next, summarize the author's argument in no more than half a page. Finally, in the remaining ½ to 1½ pages, analyze the argument. If you're responding to an article from Price and Shildrick or Tuana et al. (our two theory books): Consider whether you agree or disagree with the author's argument, how strong you find the evidence, and whether you see connections between the article and others we've studied. If you're responding to any of the other books in the course (from Bynum through the rest of the semester): Relate the chapter to at least one of the concepts we studied during the first three weeks of class. As some of our readings are more theoretical than others, you will be dealing sometimes with very explicit arguments and sometimes with an argument embedded in a personal narrative. Don't worry if the piece you're writing about isn't structured as a formal argument; it still has a main point and a way of presenting that point. These papers are intended to help you work through the reading selections before you come to class, and to give you feedback on your writing and critical analysis before you tackle the final project.

*Discussant presentations:* Three times during the semester, you and a partner of your choice will serve as “discussants” by introducing the readings for the day and posing potential discussion questions. The two of you will receive a joint score on this assignment. Your presentation must be no more than 10 minutes long, and should be similar to a response paper. Begin by summarizing the thesis and argument of *each* reading selection for the day, in order to remind everyone of the topic at hand. Then offer an analysis of the readings, and suggest at least three questions for further class discussion. As with the response papers, after the third week of the semester your analysis must include at least one of the theories and/or concepts we studied during the first three weeks. You are encouraged but not required to use visual aids such as the chalkboard in your presentations.

*Final project presentation:* One of the goals of this course is to produce new ideas on the links between gender, the body, and religion. Your project is an important part of that goal, and for that reason you are required to present your project to the class during the last week of the semester or our final exam session. Presentations should be 8-10 minutes in length; visual aids are encouraged but not required. If you need audio-visual equipment for your final project presentation, you must let me know by **Tuesday, December 7.**

*Final project:* There are two topic options and two format options for the final project. The topic options are as follows:

1. Analyze the role of gender and/or the body in some aspect of a religion that interests you. The readings we'll be studying throughout the semester offer good examples of how to do this kind of study. Your analysis must make use of at least one of the theories or concepts we've studied in class; you may also bring in works you've studied in other courses.
2. Choose a theorist or a school of thought whose work focuses on gender and/or the body *outside* of religious studies. Research this work in depth. In your project, present and analyze the theories you've researched (this part is like an extended version of the response papers), then discuss how these theories might be applied fruitfully to the study of religion.

The format options are:

1. Creative project: This format will probably work best with topic 1, although you're welcome to try it with topic 2 as well. If you choose this format, you will need to create a work of art—music, poetry, prose, dance, drama, sculpture, painting, photography, etc.—that expresses your thesis and supporting argument. To accompany your creative project, you will need to write a 6- to 7-page paper (plus your research bibliography) explaining your thesis, your argument, and the ways in which they are expressed in your art. In your class presentation, you will present your project (perform it, display it, etc.) and explain the critical analysis it embodies.
2. Formal paper: Your second format option is to present your research and analysis in a formal paper of 12 to 14 pages (plus your bibliography). In your class presentation you will need to summarize your own thesis and argument, giving your audience whatever background information is necessary to allow them to understand your analysis (this is a lot like the discussion leader presentation).

You will need to contact me (in office hours or over e-mail) regarding your choice of topic and style by **Friday, November 12**. Projects are due in class during our final exam session: **Friday, December 17** from 9:00-11:00 am.

## Course policies:

*Students with disabilities:* If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resources Center (527-5213). I'll be happy to help in whatever way I can.

*Inclusive language:* Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in this course. It's important for a number of reasons. For one thing, language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women specifically. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun "he" as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might say that "when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals." People who read that sentence are left wondering whether "he" includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like "one," "anyone," "a person," etc.), use the combined pronoun "she or he." Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun ("people," "initiates," "members," etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun ("they").

*"Late fees":* Although there are no specific due dates for the response papers, they will not be accepted after the class meeting in which we discuss the reading you've chosen to cover. Without significant advance notice there will be no make-ups for discussant presentations or final project presentations. Final projects will lose **5 percentage points** for each day they are late (this includes weekends and holidays).

*Academic dishonesty:* Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teachers, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including cheating on tests, copying others' assignments, and plagiarism. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty is permanent expulsion from Whitman.**

**This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of culturally and socially disempowered groups.**

## Course Schedule

NOTE: Please complete each day's reading assignment before coming to class.

### **Week 1: Introductions**

Tuesday, 8/31: Introduction to the course

No reading.

Thursday, 9/2: Beginnings

Read: Syllabus; Price/Shildrick 1-12; Tuana ix-xi, 1-15

Friday, 9/3: Introducing gender and the body

Read: Price/Shildrick 42-48, 179-187, 21-28

### **Week 2: Gender and body theory I** (Sign up this week in class for 3 discussant presentations)

Tuesday, 9/7: Phalluses and power

Read: Tuana 55-76, 198-214

Thursday, 9/9: Performativity

Read: Price/Shildrick 416-421, 235-243; Tuana 155-168

Friday, 9/10: Bodies disrupting gender

Read: Tuana 125-144; Price/Shildrick 111-124, 125-132

### **Week 3: Gender and body theory II** (Discussant presentations start this week)

Tuesday, 9/14: Racially marked bodies

Read: Tuana 38-52, 173-192; Price/Shildrick 93-102

Thursday, 9/16: Nationally marked bodies

Read: Price/Shildrick 388-397, 399-408

Friday, 9/17: Ability-marked bodies

Read: Price/Shildrick 432-443; Tuana 83-97, 100-119

### **Week 4: Gender, body, and religion**

Tuesday, 9/21: Gender theory, body theory, and religion (No discussants today)

Read: Tuana 247-265

→ Review readings so far; come prepared to discuss their application to religion  
(Terminology study sheet available in class today)

Thursday, 9/23: Medieval bodies and methodology I (No discussants today)

Read: Bynum 11-51

Friday, 9/24: Medieval bodies and methodology II

Read: Bynum 53-117 (not as long as it looks—there are pictures!)

### **Week 5: Gender, body, and medieval Christianity**

Tuesday, 9/28: Medieval bodily devotions

Read: Bynum 119-179

Thursday, 9/30: Medieval bodily practices

Read: Bynum 181-238

Friday, 10/1: Medieval bodily beliefs

Read: Bynum 239-297

**Week 6: Rallying Protestant masculinity**

Tuesday, 10/5: Protestantism and masculinity (No discussants today)

Read: Allen Chs. 1 and 2

**Thursday, 10/7 and Friday, 10/8: Class cancelled.** Please read Allen Ch's 3 and 4, and work on your final project.

**Week 7: Gender construction in MRFM and PK**

**Tuesday, 10/12: Fall break – No class!** ☺

Thursday, 10/14: The Men and Religion Forward Movement

Read: Allen Ch. 5 (*Discussants: Do Ch's 3 and 4!*)

**LOOK!** Response papers for Allen Ch's 3 and 4 due today

Friday, 10/15: The Promise Keepers

Read: Allen Ch. 6, begin Ch. 7 (*Discussants: Do Ch's 5 and 6!*)

**LOOK!** Response papers for Allen Ch's 5 and 6 due today

**Week 8: Evangelical gender; Gender and Jewish history I**

Tuesday, 10/19: Evangelical Protestantism and the construction of gender

Read: Allen Ch's 7 and 8

Thursday, 10/21: Gender studies and Jewish studies (No discussants today)

Read: Boyarin xiii-29

Friday, 10/22: Stereotypes of Jewish masculinity

Read: Boyarin 33-80

**Week 9: Gender and Jewish history II**

Tuesday, 10/26: Masculinity in the Talmud

Read: Boyarin 127-185

Thursday, 10/28: Freud, anti-Semitism, and sexual/gender politics

Read: Boyarin 221-270

Friday, 10/29: Masculinity and Zionism

Read: Boyarin 271-312

**Week 10: Gender and Jewish history III; Gender, Sexuality, and Tantra**

Tuesday, 11/2: Gender politics and Jewish assimilation

Read: Boyarin 313-359

**Election Day! Remember to vote if you're eligible.**

Thursday, 11/4: Introduction to Tantra (No discussants today)

Read: White Preface and Ch. 1

Friday, 11/5: Goddesses and Yoginīs

Read: White Ch. 2, begin Ch. 4

**Week 11: Gender, sexuality, religion, and power**

Tuesday, 11/9: Sex and power

Read: White Ch's 4 and 5

Thursday, 11/11: Consorts and witches

Read: White Ch's 6 and 7

Friday, 11/12: Conclusions

Read: White Ch's 8 and 9

→ **Last day to contact me about your final project**

**Week 12: Gender, religion, and abortion in Japan**

Tuesday, 11/16: Japanese Buddhism and reproductive politics (No discussants today)

Read: Hardacre 1-54

Thursday, 11/18: Abortion in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan

Read: Hardacre 55-100

**Friday, 11/19: Class cancelled. Have a great break!**

**11/20 – 11/28: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Week 13: Religion, politics, and women's bodies**

Tuesday, 11/30: Abortion and gender politics

Read: Hardacre 101-153

Thursday, 12/2: *Mizuko kuyō* and gender politics

Read: Hardacre 154-196, 251-258

Friday, 12/3: Women in the partition (No discussants today)

Read: Menon/Bhasin Ch's 1 and 2

**Week 14: Gender, body, religion, and nationalism**

Tuesday, 12/7: Nationalism and the bodies of women

Read: Menon/Bhasin Ch. 3

→ **Last day to request media equipment for project presentations**

Thursday, 12/9: Widows and communities

Read: Menon/Bhasin Ch's 4 and 5

Friday, 12/10: Borders and bodies

Read: Menon/Bhasin Ch's 6 and 7

**Finals week session: Friday, 12/17, 9:00-11:00**

→ **Project presentations**

→ **Final project papers due**