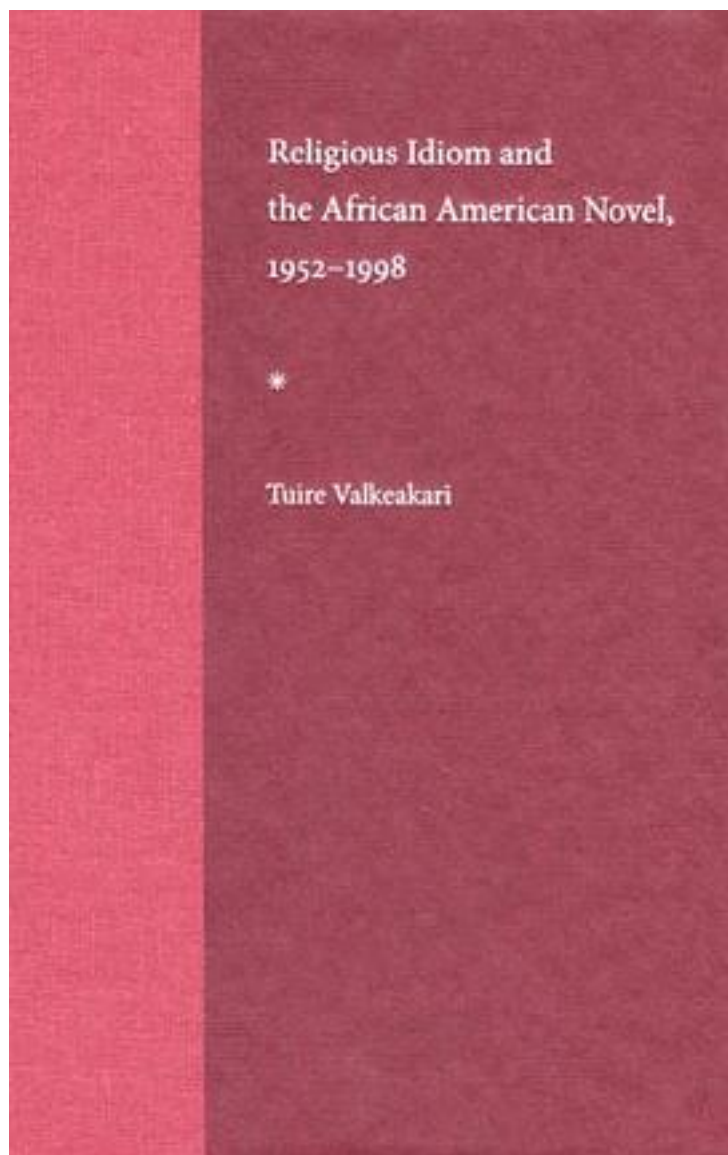


# Religious Idiom and the African American Novel, 1952-1998



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In this study of novels by Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Leon Forrest, Ernest Gaines, Randall Kenan, John Edgar Wideman, Gayl Jones, and Octavia E. Butler, Tuire Valkeakari examines the creative re-visioning and reshaping of Judeo-Christian idiom and imagery by African American novelists--specifically their use of "sacred" language for secular meaning. She shows that in writing about the complexities of American selfhood and nationhood, these authors neither abandon religious idiom nor evangelize. Rather, they delight in reshaping their chosen raw material for their own purposes, which often have little to do with the material's original context or function. Their use of biblically derived idiom is marked by innovative secular subversion and by stories of spiritual quest that defy conventional dogmatic definitions. These authors evoke religious rhetoric to study and revisit Martin Luther King Jr.'s concept of the "beloved community" and to express their yearning for an inclusive love ethic that could transcend any boundaries drawn in the name of race, class, gender, or religion. Beginning with the functions of Christian idiom in African American letters from the 1770s to the 1920s Harlem Renaissance and its aftermath, followed by an analysis of post-1950 novels, Valkeakari shows how, generation after generation, African American writers have evoked Christian rhetoric to advocate civil rights and democracy. Their treatment of this legacy reached a new level of creativity in the latter half of the 20th century, becoming a more pervasive characteristic of the African American novel than ever before.

作者介绍:

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