

Women's Studies 527
Studies in Women and Cinema
Autumn 2008
Topic: Women in Film Noir
Prof. L. Mizejewski, 113D University Hall, phone 292-2467
Office hours: Wed. 2:30-4:30 and by appointment
[email: mizejewski.1@osu.edu](mailto:mizejewski.1@osu.edu)

Course description: This course focuses on the women characters of film noir, famous as the crime genre where good girls don't last long. Class material will range from the 1940s classics to the feminist and lesbian versions of this genre. We will explore the problems and fascinations of Hollywood's bad-girl characters in these films, their historical contexts, their racial implications, and questions of spectatorship, stardom, and genre.

Goals: The purpose of the course is to provide students with the strategies of feminist film theory and feminist theories of the horror film, as well as to provide them with training in the close reading of film texts. By the end of this course, students should be able to produce in the course paper a sophisticated analysis and interpretation of a film based on the theories studied in this class.

Our web tool is Carmen. The syllabus, case study guidelines, paper guidelines, quiz preps, quiz answers, power point presentations, and related material will be posted on Carmen. At carmen.osu.edu, use your internet username (last name.#) and password to log in.

Text: E. Ann Kaplan, ed., Women in Film Noir 1998 edition (available only at SBX)
MAKE CERTAIN YOU GET THE 1998 EDITION!

Recommended website:

- <http://www.imdb.com/>: Internet Movie Data Base—excellent and reliable source of information and details about films: complete cast and crew, names of characters, etc.

Grading and course requirements:

--**Attendance is required!** You have two "free" absences before your final grade goes down one-half grade: 3 absences = one-half grade; 4 absences=one full grade, etc. Because you have two "free" absences, this means you cannot use a medical excuse unless a very serious illness keeps you out three classes or more in a row. Also please note that "attendance" means the whole class, not half of it or a portion of it. Half-classes count as absences.

--**Midterm and Final exams**, each 25% of final grade. **YOU MUST AVERAGE A PASSING GRADE (D or 65%) ON THE FINAL EXAM TO PASS THIS COURSE; TO DO THIS, REGULAR ATTENDANCE IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.** The exams will cover films,

readings, and class material and will consist of multiple choice questions of the type used for the quizzes, as well as definitions of terms and theories discussed in class.

--**Five quizzes:** 20% of final grade. These multiple-choice quizzes will be given at the beginning of the class on the dates marked in the syllabus and will include the material due for that day's class. No make-up quizzes will be given. Instead, I will drop the lowest grade, giving everyone one chance to be absent or otherwise incapacitated. Quiz study guides will be available on Carmen before the quiz.

--**Two-page research report paper**, 10% of final grade, DUE OCTOBER 28. The grade goes down one letter grade for each day late. This assignment requires you to find a scholarly essay on one of the classic noirs we study in the first part of the class--Double Indemnity, Gilda, or Mildred Pierce—and assess its argument in relation to our treatment of this film in class. See paper guidelines posted on Carmen.

--**Course paper due last day of class or at final exam (4-5 pp):** 20% of final grade. **See paper guidelines posted on Carmen.** This assignment asks you to write a comparison-contrast paper using one of the films we cover in course and a noir film you choose on your own, with a focus on women (as opposed to noirs such as L.A. Confidential and Pulp Fiction that focus on men.) Your essay needs to draw on at least one of the course readings. Graduate students are expected to write a conference-length paper, 10 pages, with appropriate additional research sources.

If you hand in the paper on the last day of class, I will grade it with comments and return it on the day of the final. Papers collected on the day of the final exam will not be returned.

Recommended for course paper:

Postman Always Rings Twice (1946) (1981)
Blue Velvet (1986)
Devil in a Blue Dress (1995)
Basic Instinct (1992) (you can use the Stables essay in the anthology)
Black Widow (1987) (female investigator; bisexual femme fatale)
The Last Seduction (1993) (ultimate bad girl?)
Body Heat (1981)
The Grifters (1990) (women criminals)
Out of Sight (1998) (woman cop)
Blue Steel (1990) (woman cop)
Red Rock West (1992)
A History of Violence (2005)

Readings on Carmen:

Arroyo, Jose. "Letter to Jane." Sight & Sound 14.10 (Oct. 2004): 26-8.
Dyer, Richard. "Stars as Specific Images." Stars. London: BFI, 1998. 60-85.

- Hollinger, "The Monster as Woman." The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film. Ed. Barry Grant. Austin: U of Texas P, 1996. 296-308.
- Love, Heather. "Spectacular Failure: The Figure of the Lesbian in Mulholland Drive." New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation, 2004 Winter; 35 (1): 117-32.
- McDowell, Kelly. Unleashing the Feminine Unconscious: Female Oedipal Desires and Lesbian Sadomasochism in Mulholland Dr. Journal of Popular Culture 38.6 (2005): 1037-49.
- Nieland, Justus J. "Race-ing Noir and Re-Placing History: The Mulatta and Memory in One False Move and Devil in a Blue Dress." Velvet Light Trap 43 (1999): 63-77.
- Noble, Jean. "Bound and Invested: Lesbian Desire and Hollywood Ethnography." Film Criticism 22.3 (1998): 1-21.
- San Filippo, Maria. "The 'Other' Dreamgirl: Female Bisexuality As the 'Dark Secret' of David Lynch's Mulholland Drive." (2001). Journal of Bisexuality; 7.1-2 (2007): 13-49.
- Scruggs, Charles. "The Pastoral and the City in Carl Franklin's One False Move." African American Review 38.2 (2004): 323-334.
- Williams, Linda. "Feminist Film Theory: Mildred Pierce and the Second World War." Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television. Ed. Deidre Pribram. London and NY: Verso, 1988. 12-30.

Schedule: Readings are all in the Kaplan anthology except for those marked "Carmen"

- Sept. 25 Introductory lecture and clips from Laura (1944)
- Sept. 30 Double Indemnity (1944)
Kaplan, "Introduction to New Edition
Gledhill, "Klute I"
- Oct. 2 Johnston, "Double Indemnity"
Place, "Women in Film Noir"
QUIZ ONE
- Oct. 7 Mildred Pierce (1946)
Harvey, "Woman's Place"
- Oct. 9 Cook, "Duplicity in Mildred Pierce"
Williams, "Mildred Pierce and the Second World War" (Carmen)
- Oct. 14 Gilda (1946)
Martin, "Gilda Didn't Do Any of Those Things"
QUIZ TWO
- Oct. 16 Dyer, "Resistance Through Charisma"
Dyer, "Postscript,"
- Oct. 21 Klute (1971)
Dyer, "Stars as Specific Images," (Carmen)

- Oct. 23 Gledhill, “Klute 2”
“Letter to Jane,” (Carmen)
- Oct. 28 One False Move (1992)
PAPER ONE DUE TODAY
- Oct. 30 Nieland, “Race-ing Noir,” (Carmen)
Scruggs, “The Pastoral and the City,” (Carmen)
- QUIZ THREE
- Nov. 4 MIDTERM EXAM
- Nov. 6 Screening: Cat People (1942)
- Nov. 11: NO CLASS; VETERAN’S DAY
- Nov. 13: Kaplan, “The Dark Continent of Film Noir”
Hollinger, “The Monster as Woman,” (Carmen)
- Nov. 18: Bound (1996)
Noble, “Bound and Invested,” (Carmen)
- Nov. 20 Straayer, “Femme Fatale or Lesbian Femme”
QUIZ FOUR
- Nov. 25: Bonus screening, class choice
- Dec. 2: Mulholland Drive (2001)
Mini-lecture: David Lynch
- Dec. 4 Love, “The Figure of the Lesbian in Mulholland Drive” (Carmen)
San Fillippo, “The 'Other' Dreamgirl” (Carmen)
QUIZ FIVE
PAPER TWO DUE TODAY OR DAY OF FINAL EXAM
- Dec. 9 : Final Exam