**Dartmouth College**

**Women’s and Gender Studies Program**

WGST 51

**“Dangerous Woman . . . Into what an abyss of misery have you plunged me!”: The *Femme Fatale* in Literature, Film, and Myth**

Spring 2014

201f Carpenter Hall

2 (MWF 1:45-2:50; x-hour: Th 1:00-1:50)

Professor: Dr. Paul Carranza

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Office: 7A Dartmouth Hall

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m., and by appointment.

**Course Description:**

The *femme fatale* is a figure that produces fear: it is Pandora in Greek myth, who unleashes evil onto humanity; the woman of Romantic fantasies who snares men and saps their strength; the women in American film noir who entrap upstanding men and then ruin them. This course will examine the figure of the femme fatale, its origins, development, and meanings in different cultures and geographical contexts.

We will begin in the ancient world, with women of myth and Biblical traditions, before making the transition to the fascination with dangerous and evil women in the Romantic period, through the end of the 19th century, and into the contemporary period with dangerous women of film.

Because we will be examining representations of the *femme fatale* in a variety of media from different time periods, the course will take an interdisciplinary approach to the material, analyzing the figure from the perspectives of literary studies, film studies, history of art, and psychoanalysis, among others.

The *femme fatale* poses many questions which we will attempt to answer in this course: how does the image of a dangerous or destructive woman arise? Is it a reflection of female empowerment and male weakness? How does it function in the societies in which it appears? Who constructs the image of the *femme fatale*? Is there anything positive in the label for women? What does the femme fatale mean now?

**Course Objectives:**

Students will . . .

* Identify to what extent sexuality and sexual relations are constructed by techniques of representation.
* Develop an understanding of how art has contributed to constructing this figure and its meanings in different social and geo-political contexts.
* Trace different discourses on women and how they have changed over time.
* Understand how literature, art, film, and television construct images differently, and the impact this has on audiences.
* Develop techniques for tracing a tradition through different cultures and time periods.
* Learn how historical factors have influenced relations between the sexes, and the literature produced about that relationship.
* Work in an interdisciplinary fashion by applying literary and cultural theory to primary texts (novels, films, etc.).
* By bringing together theoretical discourses on the *femme fatale* and primary sources, students will develop the ability to critically analyze the presence, function and role of this figure, not only as object of representation but also as a product of the discourses of power that construct it at given periods.

**Required Texts:**

Dijkstra, Bram. Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Required Films (See below for list)

**Components of the Grade and Assignments:**

Commentaries on Readings and Films (4) 28%

Midterm Exam 15%

Class Participation 20%

Annotated Bibliography for Final Paper 7%

Final Paper 25%

Final Reflection 5%

**Explanation:**

**Commentaries on Readings and Films** Students will write commentaries on a text and turn it in on the day that the text will be discussed. Each commentary should include at least two questions that reflect critical analysis of the text. The commentaries will serve as spurs to class discussion. Students will do at least **four** of the six commentaries available.

**Midterm Exam** This will take the form of short essays on the works covered up until the mid-point of the term.

**Class Participation** This involves students coming prepared to discuss the day’s readings and their participation in class discussion and group work.

**Annotated Bibliography for Final Paper** You must find at least five articles or chapters in books related to your chosen topic, and summarize them.

**Final Paper** This will be an original interpretation of a work that features a femme fatale figure. Since the work can be either one covered in class or one of the student’s choosing, works and approaches will be chosen in consultation with the professor.

**Final Reflection** At the end of the term, the student will record his or her reflection on the femme fatale as a figure, and its meaning in the contemporary world. The reflection does not have to cite texts in a scholarly manner, but it must demonstrate thought and offer a conclusion on the topic.

***Religious Observance:*** *Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance conflicting with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations*

***Disabilities:*** *Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak to me and give me a copy of your accommodations form by the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Director of Student Disabilities may be consulted if questions arise. If you have any difficulties during this course, please contact me at once and/or ask for support at the Learning Disability Center.*

***Honor code:*** *In general, students are supposed to do their own work; outside proofreading/correcting changes the student’s work, gives the professor an inaccurate idea of the student's skills, and, as such, violates the Dartmouth College honor principle. If there are any questions regarding the extent of permissible collaboration among students outside of class, or any other aspect of the honor code, please see the professor. As a Dartmouth Student you are required to comply with the Academic Honor Principle: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~deancoll/documents/handbook/conduct/standards/honor.html*

***Anti Hazing Policy:*** *The WGST Program is a firm supporter of Dartmouth's Anti-Hazing Policy.  We reject hazing in all of its manifestations.  In order to promote a safe environment for all students and not interrupt the learning experience at Dartmouth College, evidence of hazing-related practices, as defined by the Dartmouth College Hazing Policy, will not be considered appropriate in the classroom.*

**Schedule of Readings, Viewings and Assignments**

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| ***Week 1***  Mon 3/24  Weds 3/26  Fri 3/28 | -- What is a femme fatale? Introduction to the concept.  – The Femme Fatale: psychoanalysis and society. The Femme Fatale as Guilt. *Dijkstra, Ch. 1*  **Mythical Women (I)**  -- Eve: Genesis 1-4; ; Lilith: Selections from Schwartz, Lilith’s Cave.  selections from Bal, Lethal Love. |  |
| ***Week 2***  Mon 3/31  Weds 4/2  Fri 4/4 | – Pandora. Hesiod, Works and Days (Selections); Fraser, “Woman Of Consequence.”  – Sirens. Homer, Odyssey (Selections); Pollock, Griselda. “Ecoutez la *Femme*  -- **Class Canceled** |  |
| ***Week 3***  Mon 4/7  Weds 4/9  Thu  X-Hour 4/8  Fri 4/11 | **Mythical Women (II)**  – *Dijkstra, Ch. 8*  – Salome; Bentley, Sisters of Salome (Selections)  -- Wilde, Salome; *Dijkstra, Ch. 11*  -- Wilde, Salome | **Commentary 1**  **Commentary 2** |
| ***Week 4***  Mon 4/14  Weds 4/16  Fri 4/18 | **The Medieval Femme Fatale**  **--** Book of the Wiles of Women (Selections)  **The Romantic Femme Fatale**  -- Keats, “La belle dame sans merci”; “Lamia”  -- Bécquer “Green Eyes”; Rossetti; *Dijkstra, Chs. 2-4* | **Commentary 3** |
| ***Week 5***  Mon 4/21  Weds 4/23  Fri 4/25 | **The Gothic Fascination With The *Femme Fatale***  -- Lewis, M. G. The Monk. (selections)  – Kyrou, dir., The Monk.  -- Le Fanu, Carmilla; *Dijkstra, Ch. 10* |  |
| ***Week 6***  Mon 4/21  Weds 4/23  Fri 4/25 | **Femme Fatales Everywhere: The *Fin-de-siècle***  – Le Fanu, Carmilla; Welter, “Women Alone”  – Review of Wilde, Salome; Paintings by Moreau  **-- Visit to Hood Museum**; *Dijkstra, Ch. 9* | **Commentary 4** |
| ***Week 7***  Mon 4/28  Weds 4/30  Fri 5/2 | ***The* femme fatale *in Film***  – Pabst, dir., Pandora’s Box (selected scenes, viewed in class); Doane, “The Erotic Barter: Pandora’s Box,” in Femmes Fatales.  -- Von Sternberg, dir., The Blue Angel; selections from Bernheimer, Figures of Ill Repute  -- Buñuel, dir., Tristana; Miller, “From Mistress to Murderess” | **Commentary 5** |
| ***Week 8***  Mon 5/5  Weds 5/7  Fri 5/9 | ***The* femme fatale *in Film Noir***  -- Wilder, dir., Double Indemnity; Bronfen, “Femme Fatale--Negotiations of Tragic Desire.”  – Double Indemnity; Pollock, “Ecoutez la *Femme*”  – The beginning of Neo-noir: Orson Welles, dir., Touch of Evil; selections from Millett, Sexual Politics |  |
| ***Week 9***  Mon 5/12  Weds 5/14  Fri 5/16 | **Neo-Noir and Spectacle**  Verhoeven, dir., Basic Instinct;  Lynch, dir., Lost Highway;  Stables, Kate. “The Postmodern Always Rings Twice.” | **Commentary 6** |
| ***Week 10***  Mon 5/19  Weds 5/21  Fri 5/23 | **Femme Fatale in New Forms:**  -- Cortázar, “Circe.”  –Comics and graphic novels  – Femmes fatales in television today. |  |
| ***Week 11***  Mon 5/19 | Last Day of Class: Wrap-up  **Final Paper Due on Day of Scheduled Final Exam** |  |

Films (Streamed and Available through Course Reserves and Blackboard)

Basic Instinct

The Blue Angel

Body Heat

Double Indemnity

Lost Highway

The Monk

Tristana

Scholarly Articles:

Bronfen, Elisabeth. “Femme Fatale--Negotiations of Tragic Desire.” New Literary History 35 (2004): 103-16.

Fraser, L. G. “A woman of consequence: Pandora in Hesiod’s Works and Days.” Cambridge Classical Journal 57 (2011) 9-28.

Miller, Beth. “From Mistress to Murderess: The Metamorphosis of Buñuel’s Tristana.” Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols. Ed. Miller. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983. 340-59.

Pollock, Griselda. “Ecoutez la *Femme*: Hear/Here Difference.” The *Femme Fatale*: Images, Histories, Contexts. Ed. Helen Hanson and Catherine O’Rawe. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 9-32.

Stables, Kate. “The Postmodern Always Rings Twice: Constructing the Femme Fatale in 1990’s Cinema.” Women in Film Noir. Ed. E. Ann Kaplan. Rev. ed. London: British Film Institute, 1980. 164-82.

Welter, Nancy. “Women Alone: Le Fanu’s Carmilla and Rosetti’s Goblin Market.” Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre. Ed. Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006.

Books on Reserve at Baker Library:

Bal, Mieke. Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Bentley, Toni. Sisters of Salome. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002.

Braun, Heather. The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790-1910. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, ;Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

Craciun, Adriana. Fatal Women of Romanticism. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

Dijkstra, Bram. Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Doane, Mary Ann. Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis. London: Routledge, 1991.

Femmes fatales: 1860-1910. Wommelgem, Belgium: BAI, 2002.

Hanson, Helen, and Catherine O’Rawe, ed. The *Femme Fatale*: Images, Histories, Contexts. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Praz, Mario. The Romantic Agony. Trans. Angus Davidson. 2nd ed. London: Oxford UP, 1951.

Stott, Rebecca. The Fabrication of the Late-victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992.