

SYLLABUS, SPRING, 2007

LEH 300, Section XT83W “Movie Heroines in a Changing World”

Professor Marjorie Rosen

Tuesday, 6-8:40.

ROOM CA/B04.

Code 3155.

Office: Carman 271

Telephone: 718-960-7723

E-mail: Marjorie.Rosen@lehman.cuny.edu

Office Hours: Mondays, 2-4.

Or by appointment.

OBJECTIVE: To understand how patriarchal attitudes toward women, love, and various notions of beauty, youth, and marriage and happily-ever-after endings provided the underpinnings for movies from the very beginning, and influenced women along the way.

ASSIGNMENTS: This semester you will have two four-page papers plus a series of reaction papers. Your final paper will be 30% of your grade; your midterm paper will be 30%; 20% on class participation and exams; and 20% on your reaction papers based on how many extra-curricular movies you actually make time to see in their entirety outside of class, and how thoughtfully you analyze them. This is almost as important as your reading assignments, and much more enjoyable.

EXAMS: There will be impromptu exams every few weeks based on the movies we see in class and the reading assignments. No prior notice will be given.

ATTENDANCE: Since we only have fourteen classes this semester, attendance is critical. You may not have more than one absence from class without a medical note and a really good reason.

FORMAT FOR ALL PAPERS:

- Every paper must be typed and double-spaced, with a 12-point font.
- All paragraphs must be indented five spaces. No extra spaces between paragraphs.
- All papers must be paginated (that is, have page numbers).
- At the very end of the paper, use the ### sign.

- At the top LEFT of the first page of your paper, you must include:
Your name.
The name of the assignment.
The movie or heroine you are analyzing.
The correct date.
The word count.

MIDTERM: Choose three female characters from any movie through the forties, characters who can no longer be read the same way because our prevailing attitudes have changed so thoroughly since then. For each woman, carefully describe the attitudes that other characters in the movie displayed toward her – the men in her life, the women, her family members, her co-workers. How were these attitudes affected by gender, class and social expectations back then? What do these attitudes tell us about the time in which this character was created? Then flash forward and explain how attitudes toward her might have changed over the years – that is, how she might be regarded today. Do not recount the plot, except in the most perfunctory way (1-2 sentences), unless you are making a substantive point. Use dialogue to illustrate your point. DUE ON MARCH 17.

SPRING-BREAK WRITING ASSIGNMENT! Discuss how in the 50s Hollywood lobbied for marriage and against singledom for women. Use the movies of the 50s, women's (and men's) magazines from that era, and the sociology of the times to determine and support your theory. Be specific in describing scenes from the movies and explaining what these scenes mean. Make sure you organize your paragraphs according to your ideas. No more than 750-1000 words. DUE ON APRIL 17!

FINAL: From movies of three different periods, take three female characters who you think demonstrate the evolution of a particular female archetype, or a particular kind of woman in film (in other words, the girl-next-door, the femme fatale, the homemaker). Describe the evolution of that archetype through these three characters. How did each character reflect the era she represented? (Please define that era, using specific statistics and cultural and political events. You can go to the women's periodicals of the times to make your points.) How did this archetype change through each generation, and why? **Make sure you clear all archetypes and films with me**, that you study all three films, and that you support your points with particular scenes and exchanges of dialogue from the films themselves. Also, utilize secondary reading sources. No more than 4 pages. Again, *do*

not describe the plot, except in the most perfunctory way – one short paragraph or less. DUE ON MAY 8.

NOTE: Be wary of plagiarism. Be clear about what plagiarism consists of. Plagiarism means automatic failure in the course. No excuses or discussions. No negotiations. No second chances.

THE SYLLABUS

WEEK ONE: IN THE BEGINNING...

1. Tuesday, January 30.

Guiding questions: What images do you have of the relationships between men and women in the Victorian era? What associations do you have? What were the role distinctions between men and women in the Victorian Era?

Screening: Selections from early shorts: *The Kiss*. Edison's Hula Girl. "Birth of a Nation," Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford, the first star, Theda Bara in *A Fool There Was* and Nita Naldi in *Blood and Sand*.

Guiding questions: What do these images tell us about the way Victorians regarded women?

Writing assignment: Discuss the archetype of the vamp. What did this femme fatale represent? What did she want? And what did she tell us about masculine feelings toward women's freedom?

Reading assignment: *Popcorn Venus*. From the beginning through The Twenties.

Viewing assignment: Watch either *Broken Blossoms* or *Orphans of the Storm*. Write a brief reaction paper--no more than two short, succinct paragraphs--describing how the women were portrayed in the movie and how that portrayal reflected (or defied) the prevailing sentiment of the times.

WEEK TWO: THE TWENTIES.

2. Tuesday, February 6. Jazz Babies.

Guiding questions: What were the important aspects of the Twenties that would sooner or later affect women?

Screening: Clara Bow in *It*.

Reading: *Popcorn Venus*: The Thirties.

Assignment: Write a reaction paper: How was this jazz baby so completely a product of her times? In what ways was she different from the Victorian model? No more than two paragraphs.

Viewing assignment: Marlene Dietrich in *Blonde Venus* or *Shanghai Express*.

WEEK THREE -- THE THIRTIES.

3. Tuesday, February 13. Depression-Era Escapism Bombshells, Femme Fatales, and Women of Mystery.

Screening: Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco*. Garbo in *Queen Christina* or *Camille*.

Guiding questions: In what way were these women Depression-era fantasies? Could they have become popular in any other decade?

Break into groups and compare the femme fatale of the 20's with either Garbo or Dietrich. In what ways were they similar? Different?

Reading: *Popcorn Venus: The Thirties*.

Viewing assignment: *Golddiggers of 1933* or *42nd Street*. ****Write a reaction paper on the film.** Examine the relationship between the females and males in the movie. What about this movie so reflected the attitudes of the 30s? 300 words.

+ Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong*

Guiding questions: How did West control her onscreen environment? In what ways was West sexy? Powerful? Funny? Why was she such a threat back in the Thirties?

WEEK FOUR --THE THIRTIES.

4. Tuesday, February 20. Heiresses and Spunky Girls (Little and Otherwise).

Screening: Scenes of Katharine Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby*. Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday*.

Reading: *Popcorn Venus: The Thirties*.

Viewing assignment: *Gone with the Wind* + *Jezebel*. Compare Scarlett and Julie. Who is more appealing and why? Who is more modern and why? Who is more sympathetic, and why?

Viewing assignment: Shirley Temple film TBA. + Write a reaction paper. In what way was her character a typical heroine of her era? In what ways did she seem ahead of her time? 200-300 words.

WEEK FIVE --THE THIRTIES INTO FORTIES.

5. Tuesday, February 27. The Dark Side of the Depression --Flirts and Bad Girls.

Screening: Clips from *Jezebel* and *Gone with the Wind*.

Break into groups and compare Bette Davis's Julie in *Jezebel* to Vivien Leigh's Scarlett in *Gone with the Wind*. Similarities? Differences? Which heroine is more sympathetic – and why?

Reading assignment: *Popcorn Venus: The Forties*.

Viewing assignment: *Now Voyager*.

Reaction Paper: Discuss the heroines' costumes in *Jezebel* and *Gone with the Wind*. How do the clothes express character and even motivation? Discuss the heroines' relationships to their mother-figures and their mummies.

WEEK SIX -- THE WAR YEARS.

6. Tuesday, March 6. Keeping the Home Fires Burning.

Screen clips from *Meet Me In St. Louis* and *Now, Voyager*. How did the status of women change during the war? And how did Hollywood reflect this change?

Discuss Women of Color: Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen in *GWTW*, *The Women*, *Mildred Pierce*. + Carmen Miranda. What do these images tell us about America's attitudes toward women of color?

Viewing assignment: *Now, Voyager*

DON'T FORGET! MIDTERM PAPER IS DUE ON MARCH 13.

WEEK SEVEN –THE POST-WAR YEARS.

7. Tuesday, March 13. From Rosie the Riveter to the Film Noir Femme Fatale.

Screen *Mildred Pierce*.

Guiding questions: What is the difference between how the wartime and post-war women are portrayed? Anything new and fresh about them? Do you see any conflicted themes here?

Viewing assignment: *Double Indemnity*. Write a paragraph on the relationship between the Stanwyck and MacMurray characters. Compare the Stanwyck character, Phyllis Dietrichson, to Crawford's Mildred.

Assignment: Write a paper about *Mildred Pierce*. In what ways, if any, is Mildred sympathetic? Unsympathetic? Please address the mother-daughter relationship and the images of baking and cooking throughout the movie. What are they about? Use quotes from the movie to support your points, please! Due next Tuesday.

WEEK EIGHT – THE POST-WWII YEARS.

8. Tuesday, March 20. The Post-Noir Woman.

Guiding questions: Who was she? What was her modus operandi.? Who are her cinematic forbearers?

Screening: *All About Eve*. or *A Place in the Sun*.

Guiding question #1: Why was marriage such a priority in post-WWII America? In what ways is the Marilyn Monroe character in *All About Eve* a creature of her time? In what ways does her appeal transcend generations? Which other movie heroines is she most like, if any?

Extra Credit Viewing Assignment: Katharine Hepburn in *The African Queen*, *The Rainmaker*, *Summertime*. Write a 500-word paper comparing and contrasting these characters. **Guiding questions:** Where does the image of the “spinster” come from? Isn’t she the other side of the movies that are “marital instructionals?”

DON’T FORGET!!!

SPRING-BREAK WRITING ASSIGNMENT! Discuss how in the 50s Hollywood lobbied for marriage and against singledom for women. Use the movies of the 50s, women’s (and men’s) magazines, and the sociology of the times to determine your theory. Be specific in describing scenes from the movies and explaining what these scenes mean. No more than 750-1000 words. DUE ON APRIL 17th!

WEEK NINE – THE FIFTIES

9. Tuesday, March 27. Luring New (Teen) Audiences, Losing Old Ones.

Guiding question # 2: Why did the studio moguls suddenly feel the need to reinvent their product? Who were they trying to appeal to? And how?

Reading: *Popcorn Venus: The Fifties*.

Screening: Clips of Natalie Wood in *Rebel without a Cause*. Sandra Dee in *Gidget* and/or *A Summer Place*.

Guiding Questions: What are the male-female dynamics in these movies? What are they telling us about female sexuality?

APRIL 2 – APRIL 10: SPRING RECESS

WEEK TEN-- THE FIFTIES.

10. Tuesday, April 17. Sex and the Working Gal.

Screen clips of Dorothy Dandridge in *Carmen Jones* and Doris Day in *Pillow Talk* and/or *Calamity Jane*.

Guiding questions: What do these images have in common? What is so different about them? Why these particular images at this particular time?

Assignment: Read *Popcorn Venus: The Sixties and The Seventies*.

Viewing assignment: *Imitation of Life*. Discuss the mother-daughter relationships in this movie vs. the mother-daughter relationship in *Mildred Pierce*.

WEEK ELEVEN -- THE SIXTIES INTO SEVENTIES.**11. Tuesday, April 24. Sex and the Career Gal.**

Screen clips of Lynne Redgrave in *Georgy Girl*, Julie Christie in *Darling*, Ellen Burstyn in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More*, and/or Jill Clayburgh in *An Unmarried Woman* (1978). Discuss Diana Ross in *Mahogany*.

Guiding questions: How did the Vietnam War affect Hollywood's output in the late 60s and early 70s? What do these women's movies all have in common?

Viewing assignment: Finish *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More*.

Extra-credit viewing: Kathleen Turner in *Body Heat* (1981). Who are her character's cinematic sisters? In what ways is she derivative? And in what ways, is she a modern 70s creature? 300 words.

WEEK TWELVE – THE EIGHTIES & NINETIES.**11. Tuesday, May 1. When a Man Isn't Everything.**

Screening: Melanie Griffith in *Working Girl*.

Guiding questions: What does this movie say about women? About class? About relationships between men and women in the workplace? About relationships between women and women?

REMEMBER! FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON MAY 8.**WEEK THIRTEEN -- THE EIGHTIES & NINETIES****12. Tuesday, May 8. When A Man Isn't Everything, Pt. II + The Emergence of Women of Color.**

Screening: Whoopi Goldberg in *The Color Purple* and *The Associate*.

Guiding question: What do these protesting women really want? Why does Whoopi Goldberg become the first woman of color to become a major movie star? What in the climate of the 90s and early 2000s allowed the careers of Goldberg, Latifah, Halle Berry, J-Lo, etcetera, to flourish? Formulate your ideas for discussion at the next class.

WEEK FOURTEEN –TODAY'S MOVIES**14. Tuesday, May 15. Women of Color in the Workplace.**

Screening: Queen Latifah in *Beauty Salon* and *Bringing Down the House*. Jennifer Lopez in *Selena* and *The Wedding Planner*.

Guiding questions: How does each change in the course of the movie? What do you think of the women's final choices? In what ways do these women assimilate? In what ways do they *not*?
Class wrap-up.

READING LIST:Textbook:

Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream, by Marjorie Rosen.

Recommended Additional Readings:

A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960

by Jeannine Basinger.

Is That A Gun In Your Pocket? By Rachel Abramowitz. Random House. 2000.

Women Who Run the Show by Mollie Gregory. St. Martin's Press. 2002.

Sex, Art & American Culture by **Camille Paglia** (essays).

Vamps & Tramps by Camille Paglia (essays).

Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women by Susan Faludi.

The Feminine Mystique by Bette Friedan.

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir.

The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf.

From Reverence to Rape by Molly Haskell.

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in **Visual and Other Pleasures (Theories of Representation and Difference)** by Laura Mulvey (1989).

Extra Credit Movies:

Blonde Venus.

National Velvet.

The Lady Eve.

The Postman Always Rings Twice (Lana Turner).

The African Queen.

Woman of the Year.

Imitation of Life (Lana Turner version).

Erin Brockovich

To Die For.

Unfaithful.

Fried Green Tomatoes.

Real Women Have Curves.

Or see me....
