

WOMEN BEHAVING BADLY: VICTORIAN SENSATION FICTION AND HOLLYWOOD FILM NOIR

ENGL 3924/WMST 3720 • Mon/Wed. 2:00-3:20 pm • Wooten Hall 121

Professor Nora Gilbert
Office: LANG 408-E
Email: nora.gilbert@unt.edu
Office hours: M/W 12:45-1:45 pm

Course description:

This course will ask students to make cross-disciplinary connections between two narrative genres that have a striking number of formal, thematic, and production-history attributes in common: Victorian sensation fiction and Hollywood film noir. Both genres erupted on the popular culture scene and were produced, for the most part, over a contained period of one or two decades; both genres' plots revolve around scandalous and/or criminal acts that are discovered by some form of detective work; both of their narrative structures highlight the importance of (or, rather, the inescapability of) the shadowy past; both persistently dramatize the perceived social threat of "deviant" female behaviors and desires. Our primary focus in this class will be on the treatment of female transgression within these two highly specialized arenas; this is, in other words, primarily a class on the relationship between gender and genre. You are responsible for reading all assigned books and watching all assigned films prior to the class during which they will be discussed. (All films are on reserve at Chilton Media Library, but you may want to subscribe to Netflix this semester if you don't already do so.) Though I will certainly guide our class discussions and make sure that we cover all of the textual and historical ground that I consider to be the most interesting and the most important, I will not be lecturing at you. We will be working through these materials together, and your participation and thoughts and questions are not only desired but required.

Primary Reading/Viewing List

Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (1861) – Broadview edition
Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) – Oxford World's Classics edition
Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (1862) – Oxford World's Classics edition
Rhoda Broughton, *Cometh Up as a Flower* (1867) – Broadview edition

The Maltese Falcon, dir. John Huston (1941)
Double Indemnity, dir. Billy Wilder (1944)
Mildred Pierce, dir. Michael Curtiz (1945)
The Postman Always Rings Twice, dir. Tay Garnett (1946)
Gilda, dir. Charles Vidor (1946)
The Killers, dir. Robert Siodmak (1946)
Notorious, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1946)
Out of the Past, dir. Jacques Tourneur (1947)
The Lady from Shanghai, dir. Orson Welles (1947)
Sunset Boulevard, dir. Billy Wilder (1950)
Gone Girl, dir. David Fincher (2014)

Grade breakdown:

Participation and effort: 20%
Reading/viewing quizzes: 20%
2-3 page provocation response paper: 15%
Discussion leader: 5%
5-6 page critical essay: 25%
Final exam: 15%

Participation and effort: Because your participation is so crucial to the fabric of this class, it will comprise 20% of your grade. Attendance obviously affects your ability to participate, so all missed or tardy classes will serve to lower your participation grade. You must let me know ahead of time any time you are going to miss class; I can only be understanding about absences if I understand what's going on. I will also take into consideration the effort you have put forth in the class overall when determining your participation grade; if you are absolutely uncomfortable talking in class, you can contribute to this portion of your grade by coming to talk to me about the texts and/or your work outside of class.

Reading/viewing quizzes: You cannot participate if you don't come to class, but you also cannot participate if you don't do the reading and viewing. To give you extra motivation to keep up with this on a regular basis, there will be plot-point quizzes at the beginning of certain classes scattered randomly throughout the semester. Glancing over a wikipedia plot summary will not enable you to do well on these quizzes; reading and watching the actual texts, however, will make this portion of your grade a breeze. No quizzes may be made up, but the lowest score of the semester will be dropped.

Provocation response paper: About a week before each class, I will post on our Blackboard page an excerpt from a scholarly essay on the text we will be covering to serve as our discussion "provocation." Everyone should read each of these provocation excerpts and come to class prepared to discuss it, but on one assigned date during the semester you will be required to bring in a 2-3 pg. (double-spaced) written response to the provocation excerpt, in which you either fundamentally agree or fundamentally disagree with the argument of the passage and use textual evidence to demonstrate why.

Discussion Leader: On the same day that you are assigned to bring in your provocation response, you will be the "discussion leader" for the day. You may want to share some of the ideas that you wrote about in your response paper, or you may want to bring up other discussion points/ questions/ concerns altogether. If you are leading a discussion of a book, you must select one specific passage for the class to perform a close reading of together; if you are leading a discussion of a film, you must do the same for one specific film clip.

Critical essay: The major assignment of this class is a 5-6 pg. (double-spaced) critical essay exploring one or more of the texts on the syllabus. I will give you more specific direction about what this assignment will entail in a separate handout. You will first turn in a complete draft of the paper and I will provide detailed feedback on it, but no grade. (If you do not turn in your paper by the first draft due date, you forfeit your right to that feedback.) You will then revise and resubmit the paper in light of my comments, and I will assign a grade to the final product at the end of the semester.

Final exam: The final exam will be your way of showing me what you're coming away with at the end of the semester. It will consist of passage identifications/analyses, character comparisons, and short essay questions, and will be given in our regular classroom on Mon, 5/9, from 1:30-3:30 pm.

Course policies:

Email: I will, at times, send important messages via my official class email list; please begin checking your UNT email address on a regular basis if you are not already doing so. On the other end of the equation, I make it a policy to respond to student emails within 24 hours; if by any chance you do not receive a response within that time frame, please resend your email to make sure it did not somehow disappear in the internet ether.

Laptops and cell phones: Because this class is discussion/idea-based (rather than lecture/fact-based and because you are required to purchase hard copies of all the assigned novels and I will provide handouts of all the assigned shorter readings, you will be freed from the modern dependence on technology for the three hours you are with me each week. If you plan to take notes, bring a pen!

Plagiarism: If you fail to give full credit to the sources you are citing, lift a paper off of the internet, reuse a paper that was written for another class, or have someone else write any part of your paper for you, you are plagiarizing and I will catch you doing so. (All papers must be uploaded to turnitin.com via the course's Blackboard page.) Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and permanent documentation on your academic record. Zero tolerance policy.

Students with Disabilities: Anyone with a disability requiring accommodation must present a written accommodation request to me within eleven days of the first class session. Copies of the school's ADA Compliance Policy, Policy on Auxiliary Aids and Reasonable Accommodation, and the ADA Grievance Procedures are available through the main office of the School of Library and Information Sciences (940-565-2445). It is also recommended that you register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (940-565-4323).

Discussion schedule:

1/20: Class introduction

1/25: Female Transgression Mythology: Eve, Pandora, Lilith
Handouts: "How to Read a Film," "How to Read a Book," "Basic Film Glossary"

1/27: Introduction to Sensation Fiction & Film Noir
Jennifer Hedgecock, "The Emergence of the Femme Fatale in Sensation Fiction"
Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir"

2/1: *East Lynne*, Ch. 1 – 16

2/3: *Double Indemnity*

2/8: *East Lynne*, Ch. 17 – 32

2/10: *Mildred Pierce*

- 2/15: *East Lynne*, Ch. 33 – 46
- 2/17: *Gilda*
- 2/22: *East Lynne*, Ch. 47 – end
- 2/24: *The Maltese Falcon* **WATCH AT CINEMARK THEATERS ON 2/21 (2 pm or 7 pm)
- 2/29: *Lady Audley's Secret*, Vol. I
- 3/2: *The Postman Always Rings Twice*
- 3/7: *Lady Audley's Secret*, Vol. II
- 3/9: Library research visit
- 3/14 & 3/16: NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK
- 3/21: *Lady Audley's Secret*, Vol. III
- 3/23: *The Killers*
- 3/28: *No Name*, The First Scene
- 3/30: *Notorious*
- 4/4: *No Name*, The Second Scene, Ch. 1 – The Fourth Scene, Ch. 4
- 4/6: *Out of the Past*
- 4/11: *No Name*, The Fourth Scene, Ch. 5 – The Fifth Scene, Ch. 2
- 4/13: *The Lady from Shanghai*
- 4/18: *No Name*, The Fifth Scene, Ch. 3 – end * **First draft of paper due by 5:00 pm**
- 4/20: *Sunset Boulevard*
- 4/25: *Cometh Up as a Flower*, Vol. I (Ch. 1 – 19) * **First draft returned with feedback**
- 4/27: *Gone Girl*
- 5/2: *Cometh Up as a Flower*, Vol. II (Ch. 20 – end)
- 5/4: Wrapping up; class party * **Final draft of paper due by 5:00 pm**
- 5/9: Final exam from 1:30 – 3:30 pm