

FMST 640/2 Barbara Stanwyck: Gender and Genre in Hollywood Cinema

**Thursday 13:15 to 17:15 Fall Term 2018
FB 250**

Instructor:

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Barbara Stanwyck's long career, from 1929 to 1986, includes dozens of roles in comedy, westerns, melodrama, and film noir; she also performed in radio and TV. She emerged at the end of her career with her head above water and her bank account intact. As a survivor of a harsh industry, she provides valuable insight into the challenges of the system for women actors. In this course we will read key texts in star studies, performance studies, genre studies, Hollywood labour history, and women's studies in order to examine Stanwyck's intervention and agency through the five and a half decades of her career. This course will present students with a range of methods of analysis for studio-based films, using Stanwyck as a guide and as a means of examining the intersection of gender with genre, race, cultural geography, architecture, and film style. This approach to Hollywood will acquaint students with the heterogeneity of American classical cinema, which will in turn be explored as a site where gender is constantly under construction, deconstruction and reinvention.

Readings

All readings are on reserve and available through CLUES and linked to the course moodle site, except for: Andrew Klevan, *Barbara Stanwyck*, London: Palgrave MacMillan/ BFI publishing, 2013 which is available at the Concordia Bookstore.

Screenings

All screenings are mandatory. If you have to miss a class, please make sure to make up the screening on your own time. Copies of all the films are available at the VCR. In the first week of class, we may decide to replace some screenings depending on the class's preferences.

Syllabus

1. Sept. 6 Gender and Genre in Hollywood

The Miracle Woman (1931) Dir. Frank Capra, Columbia Pictures, 90 mins.

- Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill eds. New York: Arnold, 2000: 221-243.
- Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill eds. New York: Arnold, 2000: 332-350.

2. Sept. 13 Independent Stardom

Ladies They Talk About (1933) Dir. Howard Bretherton and William Keighley, Warner Bros./Vitaphone, 69 mins.

- Emily Carman, "Independent Stardom: Female Film Stars and the Studio System in the 1930s," *Women's Studies* 32 (2008): 583-615.
- Andrew Klevan, "Responsiveness," Chapter one of *Barbara Stanwyck*. London: Palgrave MacMillan/ BFI publishing, 2013: 6-28.

3. Sept. 20 Precode Hollywood

Baby Face (1933) Dir. Alfred E. Green, Warner Bros./Vitaphone, 76 mins.

- Peter Stanfield, "An Excursion into the Lower Depths: Hollywood, Urban Primitivism, and 'St. Louis Blues,' 1929-1937," *Cinema Journal* 41, No. 2 (Winter, 2002): 84-108.
- Veronica Pravadelli, "The Early Thirties: Modernity, New Women, and the Aesthetic of Attractions," in *Classic Hollywood: Lifestyles and Film Styles of American Cinema, 1930-1960*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2007: 21-42.

4. Sept. 27 The Stella Dallas Debates

Stella Dallas (1937) Dir. King Vidor, The Samuel Goldwyn Company (as Howard Productions) Released through United Artists, 106 mins.

- Stanley Cavell, "Stella's Taste: Reading Stella Dallas," in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996: 197-222.
- Linda Williams, "Something Else Besides a Mother," *Cinema Journal* 24, No. 1 (Fall 1984): 2-27.

- Recommended: Andrew Klevan, “Multiplicity,” Chapter two of *Barbara Stanwyck*: 29-56.

5. Oct. 4 Gender and Screwball Comedy

The Lady Eve (1941) Dir. Preston Sturges, Paramount, 94 mins.

- Stanley Cavell, “Cons and Pros: *The Lady Eve*,” in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981: 45-70.
- Mary Desjardins, “Classical Hollywood, 1947-1967,” in *Costume, Makeup, and Hair*, Adrienne L. McLean ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016: 47-74.
- Recommended: Andrew Klevan, “Tonal Finesse,” Chapter three of *Barbara Stanwyck*: 57-80.

6. Oct. 11 Femme Fatale

The File on Thelma Jordan (1950) Dir. Robert Siodmak, Hal Wallis Productions/Paramount, 100 mins.

- Vivian Sobchack, “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres*, Nick Browne ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998: 129-170.
- Andrew Britton, “Stars and Genre,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, Christine Gledhill ed. New York: Routledge, 1991: 198-206.
- Recommended: Andrew Klevan, “Restraint,” Chapter four of *Barbara Stanwyck*: 81-107.

7. Oct. 25 Women in Westerns

The Furies (1950) Dir. Anthony Mann, Paramount, 109 mins.

- David Baker and Danielle Zuvela, “Mann and Woman: the Function of the Feminine in the ‘Noir Westerns’ of Anthony Mann,” *Transformations* 24 (2014). <http://www.transformationsjournal.org/issue-24/>
- Jane Tompkins, “Introduction,” and “Women and the Language of Men,” in *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992: 3-19 and 47-67.

8. Oct. 18 Hollywood Performance Studies

Clash by Night (1952) Dir. Fritz Lang, Wald-Krasna Productions/RKO, 105 mins.

- James Naremore, “Expressive Coherence and Performance within Performance,” in *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988: 68-82.
- Danae Clark, “The Actor’s (Absent) Role in Film Studies,” in *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors’ Labor*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995: 1-17.

9. Nov. 1 The Woman’s Film in the 1950s

All I Desire (1953) Dir. Douglas Sirk, Universal-International, 84 mins.

- Lucy Fischer, “Sirk and the Figure of the Actress: ‘All I Desire,’” *Film Criticism* 23, No. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 1999): 136-149.
- Lauren Berlant, “Introduction,” in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008: 1-32
- Recommended: Andrew Klevan, “Stillness,” Chapter five of *Barbara Stanwyck*: 108-128

10. Nov. 8 Matriarchy

Forty Guns (1957) Dir. Samuel Fuller, Globe Enterprises Released by 20th Century-Fox, 79 mins.

- Pamela Robertson, “What Makes the Feminist Camp?,” in *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996: 1-22.
- James Naremore, “Film Acting and the Arts of Imitation,” *Film Quarterly* 65, No. 4 (Summer 2012): 34-42.

11. Nov. 15 Hollywood/TV

The Barbara Stanwyck Show Selected episodes (1960-1961) NBC TV, 90 mins.

- Christine Becker, “The Production of New Careers: Hollywood Film Actors Move to Television,” in *It’s the Pictures that got Small: Hollywood Film Stars on 1950s Television*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008: 16-45.
- Mary R. Desjardins, “‘The Elegance...Is almost overwhelming’: Glamour and Discursive Struggle over Female Stardom in Early Television,” in *Recycled Stars*:

Female Film Stardom in the Age of Television and Video. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015: 13-56.

12. Nov. 22 Student Presentations

13. Nov. 29 Student Presentations

Assignments

Presentation on weekly readings	20%
Moodle posts	20%
Presentation of research project	20%
Final paper	20%
Class participation	20%

Presentation on weekly readings and screening

Starting on week four, each week one student will be responsible for a 20 minute presentation of each of the assigned readings for the class (one article per student). The presentation should include an analysis, appraisal and contextualization of the article. This should normally involve additional research including possible film viewing. Students should not simply summarize the articles but engage with the key concepts and discuss their value to the study of Hollywood, their possible shortcomings, their historical significance, and their usefulness as methodological tools. Film clips and power point presentations are encouraged. You are encouraged to discuss these presentations with me beforehand.

Please come to the first class with a prioritized list of weeks that you would like to be responsible for and we will put together a schedule for the semester.

Moodle Posts

Weekly posts should be approximately 300 words each. They must be posted by noon on the Wednesday before the class, or they will not be read or counted toward your total grade.

Every student is responsible for a total of total of **nine** moodle posts. **Five** of them should be about the required readings: These posts should do some combination of the following: 1) pull out a good quote and explain why you like it; 2) pose a question regarding the reading; 3) compare or contrast or bring together the readings assigned for the week, or indicate how one article might relate to something else we have read in class; 4) explain how the quotation helps to understand or analyze a film that we have screened in class; 5) respond (politely) to another student's post.

Four of your moodle posts should provide an analysis of a Barbara Stanwyck film that is NOT shown in class, which you can view on your own time at the MIRC/VCR (Visual Collections Resources EV 3-3703). (This means a different film for each of your posts, although if students want to get together to watch the same film outside of class time, that is okay.) This analysis should include a discussion of genre and gender, and should provide more than an evaluation of the film. You may focus on any element, and you may make reference to the readings, or to other films, historical information, etc. Please try to situate the film historically, within Stanwyck's career, within the industry, and within American cultural history more broadly.

Research Projects

The objective of this project is to combine film analysis with historical research. For the research component you will need to consult historical sources available locally or through www.mediahistoryproject.org, or through other sources. Please refer to the course readings as jumping off points, as tools to design research questions, and as context for your projects. For the analysis component, we have almost all of Stanwyck's films available in the VCR collection on DVD. It is important that you design your research question carefully, and select a topic that is manageable within the time and length constraints of the assignment. Students are encouraged to consult with me during my office hours, or by appointment, when developing these projects.

Possible topics include:

- Reception history of one or more Stanwyck films
- Production history of one or more Stanwyck films
- Biographical history of one or more of Stanwyck's lesser-known collaborators
- Studio history of a limited period of time

Video Essay Optional Alternative to a Research Project

A video essay using primarily extracts from Stanwyck's films should be a minimum five minutes long and be accompanied by a written statement, as exemplified on <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/>. Presentations of research should include preliminary assemblage of film clips. These essays should develop a particular theme from the films and be accompanied by a bibliography. Please consult with me well before the presentation date if you are interested in this option. Students must be already familiar with digital editing and have access to appropriate software.

Presentation of Research

The length of the final presentations will depend on the number of students enrolled in the class, but normally they would be around 20 minutes. Students should be prepared to present their research and provisional conclusions regarding their topic. You are encouraged to bring film clips and illustrations. These presentations will be evaluated as works-in-progress and potential for success. A good project should be as focused as possible, with clear objectives, methodology and scope. Students are encouraged to discuss these projects before and after their presentations with me.

Final paper

Due Dec. 13 at 4 pm. Length: 4000 to 4500 words. Hard copies only, double spaced with page numbers.

These papers should be developed from the material presented in class, taking into consideration feedback from the instructor and fellow students. Check for page numbers and correct citation style. Students are welcome to write in English or French.

Class Participation

The success of the class depends in part on students' level of engagement with the material, so please come to each class prepared to discuss the readings and the screenings, ask questions, and respond to your colleagues' presentations. Participation will be graded on both the quality and the quantity of your contributions to discussion. You may want to begin a thought in your moodle post and continue it in classroom discussion; and you may want to introduce themes that you are dealing with in other courses. Please bring the readings to class in hard copy or electronic form and be prepared to discuss them in detail.

Books on Reserve in Webster Library

- Becker, Christine. *It's the Pictures that got Small: Hollywood Film Stars on 1950s Television*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.
- Berlant, Lauren. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Browne, Nick ed. *Refiguring American Film Genres*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Butler, Jeremy G. ed. *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Callahan, Dan. *Barbara Stanwyck: The Miracle Woman*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.
- Cavell, Stanley. *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Cavell, Stanley. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Clark, Danae. *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995.
- Desjardins, Mary R. *Recycled Stars: Female Film Stardom in the Age of Television and Video*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. London: BFI, 1979.
- Gledhill, Christine, ed. *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Grant, Gary Keith, ed. *Film Genre Reader III*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Klevan, Andrew. *Barbara Stanwyck*. London: Palgrave MacMillan/ BFI Publishing, 2013.

- Madsen, Axel. *Stanwyck*. New York: Harper-Collins, 1994.
- McLean, Adrienne L., ed. *Costume, Makeup, and Hair*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016.
- Naremore, James. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Polan, Dana. *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Pravadelli, Veronica. *Classic Hollywood: Lifestyles and Film Styles of American Cinema, 1930-1960*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Robertson Wojcik, Pamela, ed. *The Movie Acting Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Schatz, Thomas. *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Tompkins, Jane. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Williams, Linda and Christine Gledhill, eds. *Reinventing Film Studies*. New York: Arnold, 2000.

Additional Recommended Readings

- Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing, 1999.
- Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Home in Hollywood: The Imaginary Geography of Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Buscombe, Edward, and Roberta E. Pearson, ed. *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*. London: BFI Publishing, 1998.
- Cohan, Steve. *Masked Men: Masculinity and Movies in the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Copjeck, Joan, ed. *Shades of Noir*. London: Verso, 1993.
- Dickens, Homer. *The Films of Barbara Stanwyck*. Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1984.
- Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Diorio, Al. *Barbara Stanwyck*. London: W.H. Allen, 1983.
- Doherty, Thomas. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, Marcia Landy, ed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991:
- Fischer, Lucy. "Sirk and the Figure of the Actress: All I Desire." *Film Criticism* 23, No. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 1999): 136-149.
- Gaines, Jane M. "Dream/Factory." in *Reinventing Film Studies*, Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds. London: Arnold; New York University Press, 2000: 100-113.
- Gledhill Christine, ed. *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film*. London: BFI, 1987.
- *History of the American Cinema* Series, published by California University Press. Each volume is one decade, most of which are available electronically.
- Klinger, Barbara. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

- Naremore, James. *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Neale, Steve. *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Sjogren, Britta. *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- Williams, Linda. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White: From Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*. Electronic resource available through the Concordia Library. Contains a series of good essays on American cinema that can help fill in contextual details for the material covered in class.

Additional Concordia Information

- Plagiarism is a serious offence that can lead to expulsion from the University. Do not copy, paraphrase or translate anything from anywhere without saying where you obtained it!
- Please consult the “Code for Academic Conduct” in the University Undergraduate Calendar, also available on the Concordia website at <http://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity/code.html>

Useful Services at Concordia:

- The Concordia Library Citation and Style Guides: <http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/citations.html>
- Access Centre for Students with Disabilities <http://supportservices.concordia.ca/disabilities/>
- Academic Tutors: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/learning-support/peer-tutors.html>
- Writing Assistance: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/learning-support.html#Tutoring>
- Campus Wellness and Support Centre <https://www.concordia.ca/offices/cwss.html>