

# ***Expos 20• The Femme Fatale***

Harvard College • Spring 2020 • TTh noon, 1:30 pm • CGIS Knafel K109

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## **Course Description**

The femme fatale—the attractive, seductive woman who brings about the downfall of men—has fascinated us through the ages, from Biblical figures like Eve and Delilah, to historical women such as Cleopatra and Wallis Simpson, to the media personas of modern pop stars like Cardi B and Miley Cyrus. In the classic femme fatale narrative, the woman’s dangerous actions empower her, but she also must submit to the fact that her empowerment renders her a villain. Might this contradiction in the femme fatale’s character reflect tensions in our own evolving understanding of gender? How can the femme fatale character help us untangle the real-world gender problems that modern women and men face?

This course will begin to explore these and other related questions by studying accounts of femme fatales in literature and film. In our first unit, we’ll explore 1920s and 1930s pulp fiction as a source of the modern American femme fatale archetype, with special focus on James M. Cain’s noir novella *Double Indemnity*. In our second unit, we’ll move forward to the post-feminist movement 1990’s and examine two films featuring teenage femme fatales, comparing Gil Junger’s *Ten Things I Hate About You* to Alexander Payne’s *Election*, both released in 1999. Finally, in our third unit, students will research a modern-day femme fatale, either real or fictional, and argue why the modern version is recognizable as a femme fatale, but also represents some evolution of, or twist on, the classic archetype. Here students will be challenged not only to apply broad theories and ideas from the course, but also to reach a greater understanding of why some modern women seem so dangerous.

## **Course Design and Requirements**

The assignment schedule for this course, detailed in a separate handout, is comprised of a single-text analysis, a two-text (comparison) essay, and a multiple source essay. In addition to these three formal papers, students will have short writing assignments or “responses” due before each formal paper. Students will also be completing writing exercises or group activities during some class periods.

## **Required Text**

- The novella *Double Indemnity* by James Cain (Vintage), available at the Coop, ISBN 978-0-679-72322-6
- You will need to gain access to two movies, *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999), and *Election* (1999) for our second unit. You will need to watch

these movies more than once, so renting them each once will likely not be sufficient.

In addition, I will distribute several handouts in class throughout the semester.

## **Course Methods**

### *Saving Your Work, Keeping Updated*

•You must check your e-mail account and the course website daily. I strongly recommend storing all your work for this course on both a primary and secondary drive (cloud, flash, or other). Remember to save all of your writing. Computers failing or corrupted files will not constitute an excuse for missing/late work.

### *Readings and Responses*

•Class readings are an essential part of the course. You will not be able to pass the class if you do not complete the readings and responses on time.

### *Writing Notebooks*

•You will be asked periodically throughout the semester to do some in-class writing and note-taking. All of this writing should be done in a single notebook, which you will hand in at the end of the semester. This notebook will be evaluated on the effort put into it. The notebook is meant to be exploratory and to provide a way for you to brainstorm, so I don't expect your thoughts here to be fully formed or beautifully articulated. Please note that I will not be able to return your writing notebooks to you at the end of the semester, so you may not want to allocate your favorite leather-bound, personally monogrammed notebook for this task.

### *Communication*

•All course communication will be conducted over the email address established for each student by the university. If I should need to cancel class because I am sick or if there is another emergency, I will do so by e-mail, so **please check your university account before coming to class.** The course website will also be used extensively throughout the course.

### *Contacting me*

•E-mail is the best ways to reach me if you have questions or concerns.

If you have concerns about your work, or if personal problems are causing you to have trouble in class, you should come talk to me as early as possible. I will be more able to accommodate you the earlier you come to see me. For instance, if you're having trouble with an assignment, I will be able to offer more help before you turn in the assignment (and likewise more a week before it is due than on the night before it is due) than after the assignment has been turned in and graded. In other words, please do talk to me about any issues you may have relating to this class—and the earlier the better.

### *Writing Center*

•At any stage of the writing process -- while brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, or approaching revisions -- you may find yourself wanting help with your essays above and beyond your conferences with me and our in-class peer workshops. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center, telephone 617-496-1655) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors, and is an invaluable resource. Visit the Writing Center's website at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> to make an appointment.

## Course Policies

### *Completion of Work*

•Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Yard or House Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

### *Late Work*

•Assignments are always due at the time stated on the syllabus. Assignments due in class are due at the beginning of class. Any work handed in after I have collected/checked it will be considered at least one day late. At the beginning of each new 24-hour cycle, your paper loses 1/2 of a letter grade. (**This policy does not apply to response assignments.** Since response assignments receive credit or no credit, all late responses will receive a 0.). Late conference drafts will not receive written comments. Plan ahead for computer mishaps; lateness to class because of last-minute printing will not be accepted as an excuse.

### *Electronic Submissions*

•When sending or uploading a document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the assignment will be subject to a late penalty. It is your responsibility to double-check to make sure your document has been properly submitted—errors in Canvas submissions will not constitute a sufficient excuse for missing or late work.

### *Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance*

• Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your

situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Yard or House Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Yard Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

#### *Lateness*

- Lateness is defined as arriving within 10 minutes of the beginning of class. (If you arrive after the first 10 minutes, you are welcome to participate in class activities, but you will be recorded as being absent for that class period.) You are allowed to be late to class twice. Any subsequent incident of lateness after the second will be recorded as an absence.

#### *Participation*

- Participation means coming to class, being informed, speaking regularly, completing all in-class assignments (including group work), and attending scheduled conferences during the course of the semester. Response assignments are factored into your participation grade.

More on the subject of participation: It is unacceptable to use the web in any way not directly related to our class work during class time. Do not use class time to check your Facebook or e-mail account, for instance. Do not take calls or text during class. Using computers or cell phones for purposes not related to class work will negatively affect your participation grade for the course.

#### *Conferences*

- You and I will have three individual 20-minute conferences over the course of the semester – one for each essay assignment – to discuss your drafts. These conferences are an extremely valuable opportunity to focus your work during the revision process, as well as to talk about your progress as a writer. I will expect you to come prepared, having carefully reviewed my comments on your drafts, considered any questions you may have, and developed a plan of attack for revision. Conference weeks are extremely busy; if you miss or are unprepared for your scheduled conference, you will not be able to reschedule, so please plan ahead.

#### *Policy on Collaboration*

•The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

### **Academic Honesty:**

•Following is Harvard College’s policy on academic honesty as stated in the Handbook for Students: *It is expected that all homework assignments, projects, lab reports, papers, theses, and examinations and any other work submitted for academic credit will be the student’s own. Students should always take great care to distinguish their own ideas and knowledge from information derived from sources. The term “sources” includes not only primary and secondary material published in print or online, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student’s reading and research or from a student’s own writings, the sources must be indicated.*

*The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student. Students are expected to be familiar with the [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#). Students who are in any doubt about the preparation of academic work should consult their instructor and Allston Burr Assistant Dean or Resident Dean of Freshmen before the work is prepared or submitted.*

*Students who, for whatever reason, submit work either not their own or without clear attribution to its sources will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the College.*

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

### *Classroom Etiquette*

•Everyone in the class is expected to be respectful and civil to other members of the class. Part of this classroom etiquette is remembering to turn off all cell phones or other electronic equipment before the beginning of the class. All discussions, regardless of subject matter, will be conducted in a civil, respectful, and adult manner. Harassment will not be tolerated in any form and will result in disciplinary action. Likewise, derogatory language or actions will result in ejection from the classroom.

## **Grading**

90%—**Major Writing Assignments:** Three papers. First paper (20%), Second Paper (30%), Third Paper (40%)

5%—**Active, intelligent participation:** This means coming to class, being informed, speaking regularly, participating fully in workshops and group assignments, completing assignments on time, and attending scheduled conferences during the course of the semester.

5%—**Writing Notebook** (see explanation above)