

**Whore, Vampire or Criminal?:
The Femme Fatale on the Silent
Screen**

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The phrase '*femme fatale*' has entered into common discourse, signifying a woman deemed to be dangerous and attractive to men. Cinematically, the *femme fatale*'s most prominent period was during the cycle of *noir* films in the 1940s. However, the precursor to this archetype is to be found - growing out of Victorian social mores - in the figure of Vamp. During the 1910s and 1920s, a new brand of anti-heroine was created by the studio system, drawing on traditions of gothic literature, gender typologies and the ancient Western binarism which establishes the Good Woman / Bad Woman dichotomy. Unlike in film noir, the silent era's Vamp was not explicitly criminal, nor did she possess a hard-boiled toughness symptomatic of a film noir machismo. As the term Vamp implies, the dangerous women of the silent era were parasitic in nature, subtly debilitating and draining their prey. In accordance with a long literary and cultural history, the villainous female is sexualized and her operations are inextricable from this excessive sexuality.

This bibliography attempts to establish a foundation upon which one may further research the social construction of the trope of the *femme fatale* and her cinematic prototype in silent film. The primary exemplar of this topic is the silent screen actress, Theda Bara. Credited with bringing the term 'Vamp' to cinema and common parlance, Bara was seen as the quintessential temptress, both in terms of her portrayal of diegetic characters and the elaborate personal history invented for her by the Fox studio. However, Bara's Vamp was not a complete novelty at the time, as audiences would have been familiar with Kipling's gothic poem, "A Fool There Was," novels such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and other artistic, literary and theological depictions of the Virgin / Whore opposition.

Though the *femme fatale* has been celebrated by some as embodying an independent, powerful and unrestrained femininity, the inherent dualism which presupposes an essentially 'bad woman,' may not be a positive model to follow. The glamour, exoticism and Orientalism latent in the silent Vamp serves to conceal misogynistic underpinnings which work to define femininity in terms of predatory sexuality and, conversely, female sexuality as innately dangerous.

Foundations: The Historical Femme Fatale

“Pandora, in the Greek myth, was a beautiful woman,
manufactured by the gods to seduce and bring harm to
man”

-cited in Tabitha Goode, “Abstract Representational Space

Keesey, Pam. Vamps: An Illustrated History of the Femme Fatale. (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1997). (HQ/1154/K357/1997X)

In this book, Keesey synthesizes film stills, publicity photographs, quotes, and commentary on the femme fatale from pre-Christian Mother Goddess / Demonic Goddess oppositions to contemporary film stars. She begins her historical overview with an examination of female subjects who have informed Western traditions up to the present day, including female deities from pagan Europe, ancient India, and Classical Greece. By the Victorian era, art and literature drew upon classical mythology, as well as a series of pertinent Scriptural allusions to wicked women, such as Eve, Jezebel, Delilah, Judith and Salome.

Keesey is also interested in the relationship between the femme fatale and the female vampire, arguing that the former “acquires the supernatural qualities of the vampire, while the female vampire...relies on her ability to lure her prey with promises of sexual pleasure” (p. 21). These animalistic qualities were often depicted by a Classical hybridization of human and beast, and, by the nineteenth century, were symbolized by the wearing of furs, serpent brassieres or lounging on tiger skins. This bestial nature of women is evident in the Victorian artistic works of Rossetti and Munch. Literary premises of the demonic woman are to be found in pre-Stoker vampire lore (Goethe, Keats, et al.), which invariably depicted the vampire as a woman.

An entire chapter is devoted to Theda Bara, and focuses upon her appearance in the 1915 film, A Fool There Was. Keesey argues that Bara’s physical appearance coincided with the classical femme fatale, with an abundance of loose hair, intense gaze and heavily kohled eyes. It is argued here that as the Jazz Age no longer viewed mocking Victorian prudishness as subversive, Bara eventually became a cliché of herself (p. 77). Keesey compares Louise Brooks’ femme fatale in Pandora’s Box (1928) to the earlier Vamp, and finds that by the era of the flapper, seductive women are “victims of circumstance, not villains” (p. 85). The femme fatale, to Keesey, is the ultimate “free agent.” Thus, she is not only chastised and relegated to being the Other, she becomes monstrous and vilified (p. 139).

Doane, Mary Ann. Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis. (New York: Routledge, 1991). (PN/1995.9/F44D6/1991)

This text is a collection of Doane's essays, ranging from 1981 to 1990, which deal with the task of theorizing the femme fatale. She argues that the rise of the Victorian femme fatale was borne out of a crisis of sexual ownership – when the male appeared to lose control over the female body, she came to “over-represent” herself. This view positions the sexually assertive woman as a fetish object, both to be feared and desired. The notion of fear also surfaces in Doane's reading of the femme fatale herself, who is subject to “uncontrollable drives, the fading of subjectivity” yet, concurrently is situated as evil (p.2). Thus, the sexually transgressive woman is not a heroine of feminism, but a male production of fear.

Topics tackled by Doane include theoretical essays on Laura Mulvey's conception of the ‘masquerade,’ situating a female spectator and the castration anxiety provoked by veiled women. Dealing specifically with cinematic femmes fatales, she offers a textual analysis of Gilda, arguing that the striptease is the “perfect iconography” for the film noir, with its implications of revealing and concealing (p. 105). When speaking of Pandora's Box, Doane argues that Lulu's power resides in her gaze, which is given freely regardless of the receiver's class, position or gender (p. 148). Though Lulu has been seen as a classic seductress, her lack of knowledge and intentionality limit her culpability and prompts her eventual destruction (p. 153, and see Elsaesser).

The remaining portions of Doane's collection deal with the female role within avant-garde film practice, and an attempt to reconcile racial difference with her theoretical framework of psychoanalysis. These discussions advance the topic of dangerous femininity in new directions, with many concepts applicable for contemporary film theory. However, the strength of this crucial study is that it provides a marriage between close textual analysis (presupposing a filmic specificity) and psychoanalytical (re)interpretations regarding the structuring of women and issues of spectatorship.

Allen, Virginia M. The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon. (New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983). (Women's Research and Resource Centre: 700.82/A431F).

Allen approaches the figure of the femme fatale from the discipline of the fine arts. Stating that the image of the dangerous woman was a commonplace in the latter part of the nineteenth century, she points out that the fine arts have all but ceased to represent this stereotype. In order to locate the origins of the femme fatale and her artistic rise and entry into cultural discourse, Allen divides her text into the subheadings of prototype, archetype and stereotype. The first provides definitions, literary and artistic examples and an historical overview. The “full-blown” femme fatale is examined in terms of an archetypal rendition, while the stereotype refers to her ultimate status as a cliché (p.x).

Allen's typology of physical characteristics possessed by the femme fatale includes the well-known heavy-lidded eyes, wan complexion and abundant hair. However, in terms of historiography, Allen proposes a pertinent hypothesis. She states that legendary figures such as Salome and Cleopatra are culled from ancient myth, suggesting that the femme fatale has existed perennially since antiquity. Significantly, she conversely proposes that the nineteenth century conception of women led to, “the sin of Eve [having] been altered and intensified to produce an immensely exaggerated implication of evil” (p.6). It can be argued that this proposal allows one to move beyond viewing woman, in all her incarnations, as eternal and instead arrives at a locale of historical specificity. Her approach offers the scope for social context, social change and cultural production.

Allen's analysis moves from gothic literature to the visual depictions of the Saint / Prostitute dichotomy, arriving at the ‘Birth of a Stereotype.’ At this stage, she examines the decadent theatrical portrayals of Lilith and Salome at the European fin-de-siècle. The recurring theme throughout this trajectory, she argues, is the iconographic status of Woman developed by male artists for male viewers. This constructs woman as “immobile and silent, as utterly remote, as the Sphinx she often resembles” (p. 186).

Dijkstra, Bram. Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). (NX/652/W6D55/1986).

Like Virginia Allen, Dijkstra works with the femme fatale via Victorian pictorial representations. His project is grand in scope – dealing with various misogynistic appraisals and categories of women, encompassing the ‘angel in the home,’ the invalid, the lesbian, the mother and the degenerate. He finds that the dangerous woman frequently arrives in the form of the bestial woman. It is averred that this derives from the linkage between woman and nature, where nature is both fertile and (re)productive, yet also dangerous, tempestuous and animalistic. Another recurring motif is that of the sirens, which further illustrates the relationship between woman and a dangerous natural environment (pp. 259-71). Dijkstra’s analysis goes on to determine that women’s supposed inferiority came out of a fear of her savagery and a suppression of feminine desire. Thus, the sexual woman is not criminalized, but marginalized by means of repressing her fatal instincts.

Dijkstra also furthers a salient proposition revolving around the reaction of the Victorian man towards the femme fatale. He suggests that men were divided between those who enjoyed the masochistic pleasure afforded by an overwhelming female sexuality, and those who derided such men for their perceived lack of aggressive masculinity and their support for the liberated woman (p. 272). This approach is significant, as men - those in charge of cultural production during this period - are differentiated and positioned within the realm of artistic development that dictated the representation of the female.

Trudgill, Eric. Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes. (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1976). (HQ/18/G7T78/1976).

In this early work, Trudgill seeks out the origins of Victorian attitudes towards women, specifically focussing upon literary works (novels, journalism and sermons) produced by and / or for London's middle-class. While this work is clearly valuable in attempting to assess the relationship of a male dominated society to women, with attention paid to work, home, fashion and the body, for our purposes, the latter portion of this text is most relevant. It is in this section that Trudgill examines the classifications of women into the Madonna or the Magdalen.

Through an examination of primary sources, Trudgill arrives at the conclusion that young Victorian women were inundated with prescriptive works and ideas which encouraged the feminine ego to, "express itself in a quivering sensibility, in counterfeiting a delicate, physical fragility, in cultivating a ...self-indulgent posturing romanticism" (p. 251). In female novelist George Eliot's Middlemarch (1872), Dorothea's beauty is compared to the Virgin Mary, and she is later referred to as a Madonna (p. 259). However, one is prompted to question the widespread nature of the cult of virginity, given the anti-Catholic tendencies of nineteenth century England. However, as a feminine stereotype, it serves its purpose, especially in diametric opposition to the sexual counterpart of Mary Magdalen. The decline of this aspiration to be a saintly, virginal mother, it is argued, coincided with the development of early feminism, and the political and sexual demands which grew out of that movement.

The fallen woman, one who had lost social respectability due to her sexual actions, was ostracized and punished in Victorian literature. However, in practice, such women, including numerous prostitutes, were the targets of a moral crusade and seen as recalcitrant sinners in need of redemption (p. 282). The ambivalent nature which inevitably surrounds the femme fatale is illustrated in this contradiction between representation and social philanthropy: "after years as taboo [the magdalen] was quickly becoming totem" (p. 289). This indecisiveness between the femme fatale as a source of fear or pity leads to the question of whether or not she should be punished.

Showalter, Elaine. Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle. (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

This interdisciplinary work attends to women on the periphery of normality, at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Showalter investigates the marginality of “odd women,” or unmarried / unmarriageable women in the Victorian era, contrasted to the New Woman who questioned the importance of matrimony. Other concerns deal with the meeting of the sexual and the textual, from the works of George Eliot and Robert Louis Stevenson to Francis Ford Coppola and David Cronenberg.

Showalter also deals with the figure of Salome, arguing that her sexual power is derived from her veiled mystery and the resulting contradictory connotations of inaccessibility and transparency (p.148). She cites a nineteenth century novelist who refers to Gustave Moreau’s visual rendition of Salome: “She had become...the symbolic incarnation of undying lust...the monstrous Beast...poisoning, like the Helen of ancient myth...” (p. 149). The numerous theatrical productions of Salome set the precedent for silent film versions, such as the 1922 version starring a middle-aged Alla Nazimova, replete with exotic, Orientalist costuming and set design (p.162-3).

Another version of the femme fatale is the vampire. Showalter textually examines Stoker’s Dracula in order to tease out the role of the female vampires. Though subordinate to the count, these feminized monsters operate through their sexual appeal in order to destroy their male victims. In turn, male vampires in this novel solely prey upon women (p.180). This relationship underscores the bond between violence, death and sexuality. Showalter argues that the group slaying of the female vampire with a phallic wooden stake is the ultimate form of gang rape and the ensuing decapitation represents an act of female castration (p. 181). By examining the issue of historical crises of sexuality, this text is able to locate the notion of the sexualized woman and her stigmatization as evil.

Representations:
The Cinematic Femme Fatale

“I have the face of vampire, perhaps, but the heart
of a *feministe*”

-cited in Eve Golden's Vamp

Staiger, Janet. Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

Staiger's overview of constructions of 'bad women' takes into consideration the emptiness of a sign without a historical referent and the resulting importance of a historical specificity. This approach incorporates a rejection of the feminist binarism of Woman as Other, in favour of locating Woman as a sign with multiple meanings (p. xiv). Staiger alludes to the prevalence of sex in early American cinema, the cycle of White Slave film, and Pola Negri's social butterfly in The Cheat (1915).

When focussing her attention on the development of the Vamp, Staiger turns to Theda Bara's A Fool There Was (1915), which she describes as part of a "fallen man genre." She argues that this text utilizes the femme fatale as a vehicle for questioning the stability of the traditional nuclear family (p. 147-8). Unusually, this reading of the film suggests a degree of culpability placed upon the husband for allowing himself to be led astray by the Vampire. Staiger delves deeper into the Woman as Vampire paradigm and suggests that not only are vampiric women predatory and parasitic, but are also essentially 'gold diggers,' and as such are in an economic situation where they have little to lose by pursuing their goals of advancement (p. 149). Thus, the fear of the precariousness of the familial moral and economic equilibrium is foregrounded through the use of the femme fatale as a narrative agent. She is no longer simply fulfilling her sexual desires, but is actively seeking promotion in terms of economic and social status – a promotion that can only occur via the conquest of a man of power. This historically informed view of the femme fatale synthesizes women's peripheral role and repressed sexuality prompting one to merge various possible factors when seeking to explicate the actions of the Vamp.

Higashi, Sumiko. Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine. (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1978). (Women's Research and Resource Centre, 791.43082/H634V).

As the title suggests, Higashi views the femme fatale as a cinematic heroine, a position which has since garnered some criticism. It is argued that the Vamp was established in a direct contradiction to the "imperilled white womanhood epitomized by Lillian Gish" (p. 55). While treading over familiar Bara historiography, in emphasizing the disparities between her personal life and the elaborate mythical constructions, Higashi also offers valuable insights into considering the femme fatale as vampiric.

It is pointed out that an *homme fatal* may be labeled a 'Don Juan' or a 'Lothario,' yet there is no connotations of the occult or the monstrous (p.58). This serves to underscore the point that in the pre-film noir period, the femme fatale was defined by both her inhuman monstrosity as well as her virulent sexuality. This monstrosity suggests power, and Higashi suggests that an "aggressive siren" renders the male victim passive and masochistic (p.59). This inversion leads to the feminization of the male character.

A second strength of Higashi's work is the proposal that femininity's relationship to morality may be better understood as a sliding scale instead of a simple dichotomy. A quote from the Dramatic Mirror illustrates this point: "The Vampire is a neurotic woman gone mad" (p.60). Again, the historical softening of the Vamp's power is referred to, with the assertion that by the time of Greta Garbo's femme fatale incarnations, "the vamp metamorphosed from a caricature into a truly desirable and believable woman" (p.75). This statement falls into the camp of those who believe that the femme fatale is, or can be, an ultimately positive figure.

Rosen, Marjorie. Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream. (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1973). (Women's Research and Resource Centre, 791.430909352/R813P).

This early look at the role of women in film history is admittedly dated and provides only a cursory overview. However, it was an innovative project in its time, and serves to illustrate a populist view of women in cinema. Rosen's goal is to chart the progress of Hollywood representations of women in tandem with changing social conditions. From this perspective, Rosen seeks to determine the misogynistic treatment and devaluation of the female star: "For the Cinema Woman is a Popcorn Venus, a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions" (p.13).

When examining popular cinema of the 1920s, Rosen argues that this decade was initiated by a *joie de vivre* propelled by a female youth culture of 'flappers.' Additionally, the 1920s saw the birth of the chorus-girl genre, which, after the arrival of sound, would develop into the back-stage musical (pp.97-8). Actresses known for their roles as Vamps often contributed to this genre, such as Pola Negri and Bebe Daniels. These films shared a common theme, with one figure cited suggesting that seventy percent of chorus-girl films focussed on "the winning of another's love" (p.101). It was not just love, but also financial and social gain that was propagated, with the narrative and characterization repeatedly depicting an exchange of sex for personal advancement.

This precedent, along with other factors, led to an increase in censorship. This measure worked against the 'unpunished Vamp' model of A Fool There Was and significantly softened the evilness of the femme fatale. This distinction is precisely what makes Rosen's text salient for this study, as she charts the development of a "serpentine" and "monstrous" Theda Bara, to the safely villainous Jazz Age Vamps.

Card, James. Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994). (PN/1995.75/C37/1994).

This populist text is informative insofar as it directly addresses the iconography of the 1920s Vamp, within the history of American silent cinema. Card locates the origins of this type in the European artistic imports, specifically, Philip Burne-Jones' famous The Vampire, a painting which depicts a scantily clad woman atop her prostrate male conquest. He also invokes Kipling's The Vampire, the poem which spawned the phrase 'A fool there was' which was to be the title of Theda Bara's first Vamp film. However, unlike typical histories of this phenomenon, Card offers the insightful fact that Robert Vignola had directed a film also entitled The Vampire in 1910, years before A Fool There Was. An erotic dance sequence choreographed for this film drew its inspiration from Burne-Jones' painting (pp. 183-5). Additionally, he makes reference to extratextual influences, such as popular songs of the day. One such example offered is the 1919 musical success, "The Vamp Fox-Trot," which was accompanied by a poster of an exotically dressed flapper enshrouded in tendrils of smoke (p. 185). This methodology serves to highlight the existence of precursors and contemporaries of Bara who all served to depict and reinforce the image of the Vamp and establish visual and iconographic codes. He concludes his section on the cinematic femme fatale with the assertion that while popular stars such as the Gish sisters and Mary Pickford offered a sexless version of femininity, the Vamp offered sex for personal gain. He states that the femme fatale gave way to the notion of "sex for fun" embodied in the extroverted flapper type of Clara Bow (p.199).

**Silent Film. Abel, Richard ed. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996).
(PN/1995.75/S55/1996)**

This collection contains essays which are of great use to the study of women and silent film. Rather than providing a textual analysis, Gaylyn Studlar attends to the issue of the popular press and its relationship to cinema. In “The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women’s Commodified Culture in the 1920s,” Studlar examines the state of silent film audiences when the vast majority of film-goers were women. Though these figures are disputable, it has been suggested that a great deal of women were intrigued by the motion picture, not solely due to individual films, but in part, because of the “extratextual cinematic discourse” found in women-oriented fan magazines (pp. 263-4). These publications not only aided in the development of a cult of personality, but also dictated the trinity of “marriage, romance and consumerism.” This statement emphasizes the social conditioning of women to uphold matrimony as opposed to the unruly women who eschewed these values.

Studlar argues that these publications which targeted women also ushered in an epoch of sexual liberation, or a “new feminism.” This growing preoccupation with the possibility of female sexual desire is articulated in a 1922 marriage pamphlet: “the opposite type of woman who is the greatest danger to the health and even life of her husband...the hypersensual woman...with an excessive sexuality” (p. 275). Studlar argues that it is these fears and the growing ability to discuss them in a public forum that fan magazines helped to disseminate to a large female readership /film audience.

Wyman, Leah M. and George N. Dionisopoulos. "Transcending the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy: Telling Mina's Story in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*". Women's Studies in Communication. Vol. 23, no 2. (Spring, 2000). pp. 209-237.

This essay is beneficial as it illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of the femme fatale. The cinematic incarnation of a dangerous woman is predated by literary and artistic productions, and the filmic versions of Dracula are informed by Victorian literature and ancient mythologies. Significantly, the vampire is a recurring trope of the femme fatale, and the two images have overlapped repeatedly. Wyman and Dionisopoulos seek to move beyond the Virgin / Whore opposition, which they argue is a framework based upon the needs and experiences of men. Therefore, their methodology requires a reworking of this paradigm in order to account for women's experiences.

They argue that both the Virgin and the Whore are powerless figures, thus denying social agency to either figure (p.212). This perspective coincides with the argument that the femme fatale is not necessarily a progressive figure, and that her power is only defined in sexual terms, in relation to her (male) victims.

In offering a standardized reading of the film, the authors situate Mina as the 'protected virgin,' Lucy as the 'powerless whore,' and Dracula's brides as 'powerful whores.' The latter category involves a trio of seductive women who initiate sexual acts, inflict brutality, and are eventually slain (220). One is described as "like and animal," another as a Medusa, and all as "grotesque and erotic" (p.220-1).

In their revisionist reading, Mina is centralized, and the male characters are presented as existing to define her sexuality. Noticeably, however, the vampire brides are given cursory treatment in this framework. The authors note that their function may be to prompt Harker to explore his sexuality. Harker uses the term "impotent with fear," suggesting that his eroticism is suppressed by his fear of uninhibited lust and feminine power (p.230).

Pandora's Box / Die Büchse der Pandora (GW Pabst, 1929, GER).

This film is something of a showcase for American star Louise Brooks. Brooks plays Lulu, a character developed in Wedekind's novel of the same name. Critically, Lulu has been seen as either a demonic femme fatale or as a Weimar flapper, hence feminist / anti-feminist readings of the character persist.

The film is very much of its time and place in that issues of sexuality are foregrounded. The promiscuous and desiring body of Brooks is foregrounded by both longing glances from other characters and the camera itself. The taboo depiction of lesbian desire is also articulated, as Lulu is sought after by a Countess. Ultimately, Lulu travels to England, degenerates into a common prostitute and is murdered by the mythologized Jack the Ripper. This narrative punishment is significant, as a routine denouement employed to present a moral commentary on a sexualized woman.

Lulu's role as a femme fatale has been debated, yet she possesses qualities typical of that trope. She embodies the iconography of a Vamp with her angular, ebony hair, sharp gaze and slinky costuming. Though her veneer of wide-eyed innocence suggests an adolescent delinquency, her overt eroticism, active sexual pursuits and objectification of her conquests point to a character profile influenced by the tradition of the femme fatale.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, Pabst and 'Pandora's Box'" Screen, 24, Nos. 4-5. (July-October, 1983). pp. 4-36.

Elsaesser begins by asserting that Lulu, in Pandora's Box (1929), is both an erotic icon fostered by the creator (i.e., director, GW Pabst) and a narcissist. He asserts that this dualistic relationship parallels the anxiety of the creature's liberation from the creator, a motif present in other early German films, such as The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari and Metropolis.

Though Lulu may be seen as a femme fatale, Elsaesser refutes this. He argues that the femme fatale is predicated upon a sociological and biological paradigm, opposed to Lulu's technological-constructivist underpinnings (p. 33). However, like the representation of the femme fatale, Lulu's overdetermined sexuality is representative of broader fears circulating around a non-bourgeois social order, including the Law and the Family (p.8). The femme fatale, he continues, is a product of both guilt and desire (on the part of the woman) but also on the part of the male myth-creator reminiscent of a guilt and desire related to colonialism and conquest (p.10). Again, he refers back to the relationship between sexuality and economic position, insofar as the bourgeois man eschews sexual passion as the antithesis to his social and moral foundations. Therefore, sexuality is aligned with the "lumpenproletariat" (p.10-11).

Though some may argue that Lulu cannot be a femme fatale because of her apparent innocence and childlike wonder, Elsaesser appears to refute this, by stating that Pabst was seeking to redefine the active/passive dichotomy without absolving Lulu of culpability. Unlike Bara's Vampire, Lulu is punished by the narrative, being murdered by Jack the Ripper. A proposed feminist reading may suggest that at the moment she manifests her sexual desire, she has succumbed to an Oedipal and patriarchal logic (p.20).

Davidson, David. "From Virgin to Dynamo: The 'Amoral Woman' in European Cinema". Cinema Journal 21, No 1. (Fall, 1981). pp. 31-53.

Davidson argues that the image of the femme fatale, from Theda Bara to film noir, is regrettably characterized by caricature and sentimentality. He aims to provide a textual analysis of three films which are all under the umbrellas of European cinema, modernism and masculinity: Pandora's Box (1929), The Blue Angel (1930) and Jules et Jim (1961).

When referring to Pandora's Box, Davidson points to the establishment of the Virgin / Whore dichotomy when Lulu is first presented as a snake, and later, is called "Eve" by her husband (p.32). Picking up on Leslie Fielder's comment that, "only the dead woman becomes neither a bore nor a mother," woman is therefore mystified and eternalized (ibid.). Focussing, like Elsaesser, on Lulu's death, Davidson states that she has been destroyed at the precise moment of her demystification (i.e., she has become a common prostitute) (p.33). He argues that this mystification of the female drives women into a state of narcissism, which is evident in Lulu's own self-love (p.37).

Davidson links the 'bad woman' to the 'modern woman' by stating that her sexual aggressiveness is symptomatic of dynamic industrialization, while her cruel dehumanization is a quality inherent in modernism (p.45). In this way, the Industrial Dynamo has replaced the Biblical Virgin. This analysis moves beyond the notion of the femme fatale as timeless and mythical, and brings the stereotype into an evolving historical context.

Wager, Jans B. Dangerous Dames: Women and Representation in the Weimar Street Film and Film Noir. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999). (PN/1995.9/F44/W35/1999).

This monograph deals primarily with the German cinematic representation of the femme fatale, in the 1920s ‘street films,’ and the American film noir period of the 1940s and 1950s. In these films, the seductress is inevitably punished by the narrative trajectory, creating a paradigm of sexual woman as criminal. Wager contrasts the femme fatale with a trope of female characterization he terms ‘*femme attrapées*,’ or the ‘trapped woman,’ who serves a redeeming function.

Wager also responds to the hypothesis that the monstrous / vampiric woman is closely aligned to the criminal woman. He states that the silent German cinema, including the Expressionistic movement, offered a depiction of male fears about women beginning with vampires or feminized monsters (such as Nosferatu and Dr. Caligari’s somnambulist) and culminating in the phallic power of Dietrich’s Lola Lola in The Blue Angel (1930) (p.23).

Close textual analysis is applied to prominent street films, such as The Street (1923), Variety (1925), and Asphalt (1929). In these films, the nocturnal, urban, hedonistic nightmare which threatens bourgeois normalcy, is closely bound to the criminal woman who operates through her sexuality.

Wager’s methodology is contingent on his decision to work within the context of cultural studies, as opposed to traditional film studies. Though well versed in the theory and language of cinema studies, this study aims to assess the processes of consumption and to situate an active viewer. His pragmatic approach offers scope for a reception-based study, allowing for an analysis of women audiences separate from the psychoanalytical model of female spectators.

Hales, Barbara. "Woman as Sexual Criminal: Weimar Constructions of the Criminal *Femme Fatale*". Women in German Yearbook. Vol. 12 (1996). pp. 100-117.

The inter-war Weimar period can be cinematically seen as located between the early silent films and American film noir in terms of its representations of dangerous women. Hales argues that films of this era, such as Pandora's Box, present the femme fatale as a sexual criminal. This criminality appears to have developed in film during the 1930s, at least in the United States. Hales seeks to correlate Weimar scientific studies, police reports, and mainstream journalism with the cinematic sexual-criminal (p.101). To illustrate her findings, she makes reference to the cycle of 'street films,' urban dramas which provided an exposé of street life.

After presenting the reader with a detailed historical overview of misogynistic sociological and psychological literature disseminated in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century, she moves on to discuss The Street and Asphalt. The former involves a bourgeois man becoming tempted by the lure of a hedonistic nocturnal street-life. By partaking in this subculture, the man is immediately confronted by a femme fatale who approaches him with the claim that she has been robbed. The prostitute in this case is presented as both a trickster and an exhibitionist (p.109). Their evening includes excessive drinking and disastrous gambling. Hales suggests that prescriptive German literature drew a correlation between the seductress and games of chance, again, linking the femme fatale's material goals with her predatory sexuality. Finally, normality is restored with the man returning to his wife and home, the prostitute left in a run-down apartment with her young daughter (p.113).

Criminality, especially involving money and goods, is closely linked to the sexual woman. Hales argues that in the Weimar era, "The construction of the criminal woman became a signifier for the fear of women's liberation, the new importance of the city, and for the fledgling nature of the German republic" (p.116).

A Fool There Was (Frank Powell, 1915, USA).

This is one of the few surviving films starring Theda Bara, and, indeed, is one of her most important. A Fool There Was was based upon Porter Emerson Browne's play (1909), in turn drawing the title from a poem by Rudyard Kipling. The film coined the phrase ('spoken' by Bara's character), "Kiss me, you fool" and originated the term "Vamp." The narrative itself simply consists of a raven-haired, fashionable young woman seducing a diplomat, and eventually leading him away from his social position, his wife and his young daughter.

Though the notion of the femme fatale was not new or original to audiences at that time, the manner in which the narrative tolerates the unnamed Vampire is significant. Unlike in film noir, the seductress is not punished at the end of the film, nor is the husband happily reinstated into his bourgeois life. The Vampire exerts an almost supernatural power over her victim, yet this power is not explicated in terms of the occult or the man's inherent weakness. Rather, it is made explicit that her sexuality is innate and can be channeled for her own materialistic gains.

This is not to suggest that the characterization of a 'gold-digger' or 'home-wrecker' who receives no retribution is a positive, proto-feminist image. However, the saliency resides in the fact that the Vampire is allowed to express a female sexuality without the narrative crime-punishment paradigm. The 'unhappy' ending would be worked against in later films involving a femme fatale character, yet has been resurrected in more recent productions.

Golden, Eve. Vamp: The Rise and Fall of Theda Bara. (New York: Emprise Publishing, 1996). (ISBN 1-887322-00-0).

Golden's biography on Theda Bara reflects her background as a film historian. She has managed to write an adequate life history, which incorporates a deep understanding of the early studio system and the American silent film. Inevitably, the book highlights the disparities between Bara's mundane personal life and the extravagant cult of personality concocted by the Fox publicity machine. In doing so, Bara was touted as an exotic and mysterious Other, in stark contrast to an average, middle-class Midwestern girl (which, of course, she was).

The strength of this biography resides in its extensive excavation of publicity materials, popular songs and print media in order to present the widespread appeal of Bara's Vamp. Her detailed research is evident in Pam Keesey's repeated referencing of this text and of Golden's findings. Golden cites handwritten poems written to Bara by her, mostly female, fans; journalistic interviews; contemporary film reviews; archival film stills; and personal testimony. In 1917, the popular magazine Motion Picture sent their seasonal wishes to Bara, writing: "Theda Bara do not pause/ For Vampires we adore;/ And may the New Year give you cause/ To Vampire more and more!" (p. 113).

As with other accounts of Bara life, Golden provides evidence of a proto-feminist stance adopted by the Vamp in her personal life: "The vampire that I play is the vengeance of my sex upon its exploiters...I have the face of a vampire, perhaps, but the heart of a 'feministe'" (p.105).

This biography locates a constructed personality within the context of silent film, specific texts and the studio system. Though it does not examine the theoretical or specifically feminist underpinnings of Bara's persona, it presents a rare insight into popular reception of the femme fatale in the 1920s.