**STUDIES (WMST) 300-004**

**ENGLISH (ENG) 369-001**

**NEW CENTURY COLLEGE (NCLC) 375-006**

**WOMEN WHO KILL**

Fall 2010

Wednesdays 4:30 - 7:10 pm

210 Robinson A Building

**Dr. Paula Ruth Gilbert** Office Hours:

Room 319 Aquia Building Tuesdays 2:30 - 4:00 p.m.

(703) 993-1102 (office) Wednesdays 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

(703) 993-1220 (Modern and Classical Languages) and by appointment

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

For many reasons, our society at large does not seem to accept the "reality" that women can have feelings of anger, aggression, and violence. Many people cannot understand why some women act on these feelings and perpetrate violent crimes. Such women are usually seen simplistically as either mad or bad, rather than as the complex human beings that they are. This course will allow us to read, view, and discuss issues of female violence--in theory, the real world, and the representational world of fiction, film, and popular culture. We are not talking here of women who commit violence because of abuse, but rather of those who perpetrate violent acts on their own, who act violently as a result of numerous causes. We shall be considering some theoretical works that attempt to explain female violence (as compared to male violence) and how it is seen by others. We'll read and talk about the Andrea Yates case--that of a profoundly disturbed infanticide. We shall be reading and discussing two novels (one British and one English Canadian) and one set of short stories about violence and violent women. In some of these works, the use of humor is prevalent, as the violent female characters mock our notions of male killers. And we'll be watching and analyzing some films, including the feature film, *Monster*, along with two documentaries about the life of serial killer, Aileen Wuornos. Other feature films will deal with adolescent murder, women imitating violent men, and a strangely humorous "take" on female violence. It's a fascinating and intriguing topic. We shall be serious about it and have some fun talking about it, as well. This is a student-centered course, and everyone will be encouraged to participate in our discussions.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace*. New York: Random House/Anchor Books, 1997.

Campbell, Anne. *Men, Women, and Aggression.* New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Dandurand, Anne, Claire Dé, and Hélène Rioux. *Three by Three.* Trans. Luise von Flotow. Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1993. ISBN: 0-920717-69-1.

Jones, Ann. *Women Who Kill.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2010.

O'Malley, Suzanne. *"Are You There Alone?" The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates.* New York: Pocket Star, 2005. [**PLEASE NOTE: This novel is currently out of print. I have purchased enough used copies for 2-3 students to share the book. It is essential, however, that each group of students work out how they will share the text. Students must also return the novel to me once we have completed our study of it. It is also possible to find this book in a new or used copy through Amazon.com, if you prefer to purchase your own copy; it is also available as a download on Kindle.]**

Zahavi, Helen. *Dirty Weekend.* San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000. [**PLEASE NOTE: This novel is currently out of print. I have purchased enough used copies for pairs of students to share the book. It is essential, however, that each pair of students work out how they will share the text. Students must also return the novel to me once we have completed our study of it. It is also possible to find this book in a new or used copy through Amazon.com, if you prefer to purchase your own copy.]**

***On e-reserve*: WMST 300, Women Who Kill, Fall 2010:**

Lombroso, Cesare and Guglielmo Ferrero. *Criminal Woman, The Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*. Trans. and Intro. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004. 3-33 [plus photos and drawings to be shown in class]

Gilbert, Paula Ruth. "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes." *Journal of Violence against Women* 8.11 (2002): 1271-1300.

Inness, Sherrie A. *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular* *Culture.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. 11-27.

**In addition, we shall be watching outside of class and then discussing in class the following feature films and documentaries (on reserve in Johnson Library and generally available on Netflix, etc.)**

*Heavenly Creatures.*  Dir. Peter Jackson. Perfs. Melanie Lynskey, Kate Winslet, Sarah Peirse, Diana Kent. Videocassette. Miramax, 1994.

*La Femme Nikita.* Dir. Luc Besson. Perfs. Annie Parillaud and Marc Duret. Videocassette and DVD, 2000. MGM/UA Studios, 1991.

*Office Killer.* Dir. Cindy Sherman. Perfs. Carol Kane, Molly Ringwald, Jeanne Tripplehorn. Videocassette. Buena Vista Home Entertainment/Dimension Home Video, 2003.

*Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer--The 1992 Interviews.* Dir. Nick Broomfield. Lafayette Film Production/Channel Four, 1992.

*Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer.* Dirs. Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill. Lafayette Fillms, Lantern Lane Entertainment, Ltd., 2003.

*Monster.* Dir. Patty Jenkins. Perfs. Charlize Theron and Christina Ricci. Newmarket Films, 2003.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

To develop and demonstrate critical thinking skills.

To better one's ability in understanding, reading, and speaking.

To strengthen one's research skills and to use those skills to produce both written work and an oral presentation.

To become more aware of the serious issues surrounding issues of gender and violence and why it is that some women are perpetrators of violent actions.

To understand more fully and profoundly the connections between narrative texts and historical and contemporary issues related to gender and violence and specifically to women and violence.

To see connections between learning about these matters and social action.

**COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

Attendance and Participation: Much of the value that you will receive from this course will come from both your course readings and viewings and from your interactions with others. Your attendance and participation, therefore, are extremely important to the class and your learning process. Do not miss class!

Assignments: You are expected to complete all assignments on the assigned due date. No late assignments will be accepted. If you are having difficulties completing an assignment, contact me in advance.

Honor Code: George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. See [honorcode.gmu.edu](http://honorcode.gmu.edu/) for more detailed information.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format (i.e. for this class, MLA format is preferable). A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

E-Mail Accounts: It is important to have and use an e-mail account. According to guidelines established by the University, each student is to access and use her/his GMU e-mail account when corresponding with the professor and with other students in a given course. Although written assignments are to be handed in both digital form and as a hard copy, e-mail accounts will allow each of you to be in touch with me and with the others regarding assignments, questions, and discussions.

**RELEVANT CAMPUS AND ACADEMIC RESOURCES**

#### Disability Support Services: Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance should make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Support Services (SUB I, second floor; 993-2474) to determine the possible accommodations you might need and should talk with me to discuss reasonable accommodations.

Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR) Center: Johnson Center 229 / 993-8990

Writing Center: Robinson A116; 993-1200

Counseling Center: Student Union 1 (SUB 1), Rm. 364; 993-2380;.gmu.edu/departments/csdc

Sexual Assault Services: SUB I, Rms. 219L & 219M; 993-4364; [www.gmu.edu/facstaff/sexual](http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/sexual)

Women’s Studies Research and Resource Center: Johnson Center 240K; 993-2896; jcweb.gmu.edu/communities/wrc

**PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING DATES**

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.   
Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website registrar.gmu.edu.)

14 September: Last day to drop with no tuition liability

14 September: Last day to add classes

1 October: Last day to drop classes

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.  
Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Class Participation** (25% of the final grade):

It is important that students in this class find their own voice. As you will soon learn, I see this class as collaborative and participatory; we shall all benefit not only from our readings and viewings, but also from our class discussions to which each of us will bring an individual perspective. Through class discussions and individual assignments, you will have the opportunity to discover new perspectives and examine ideas that were previously unchallenged. Open discussion depends on the development of trust and safety among participants, as well as risk-taking and effective facilitation. It is, therefore, essential that class members attend all scheduled classes and participate in class discussions. In addition, I encourage you to aid your oral participation by bringing to class relevant materials from newspapers and other media forms. I shall be giving each student a class participation grade approximately 3-4 times during the semester, and these grades--as all grades--are available for each of you to see. Progress in class participation throughout the semester will be taken into consideration for your final participation grade.

**Quizzes on Readings and Viewings** (15% of the final grade):

The purpose of these quizzes is to make sure that you are keeping up with the reading and viewing assignments and are understanding the theoretical texts, the novels, the short stories, and the films. The format will vary from short-answer questions to brief in-class writing.

**Oral Presentation(s) on the Texts** (15% of the final grade):

For each of the texts, students will be given either a theme to discuss or a passage to analyze orally in class. These presentations will add to our understanding of the work and will ensure that everyone participates in discussions. Given the full enrollment in this course, each student will be responsible for one oral presentation during the semester.

**Final Research Paper** (45% of the final grade):

Each student will choose, research, and write a final research paper of 8-10 pages. This paper can be a further investigation into theories and "real life" case studies of women and violence and women who kill, or it can be an analysis, within a theoretical, gendered, and cultural context, of a work of representation--novel, short stories, film, documentary, theater, dance, visual arts, music. Please choose this topic as early as possible in the semester. All topics must be approved in advance and you are required to submit **an outline of your paper, along with a list of 5 critical outside sources by 10 November**. You can use either MLA or APA format, although MLA is the preferred style for this course. Do not forget to indicate (in parentheses) all page numbers from which you cite directly or paraphrase. All papers must be typed and corrected for errors in grammar and typing. Each paper must be double-spaced, using an 11-12 point font, with page numbers, and one-inch margins. All papers must be submitted both electronically and in hard copy.

You do not need a cover sheet. Simply start on page 1 (although the first page is not numbered), and place your name at the top right-hand corner of each page. No folder is necessary; just staple the pages together. It is absolutely necessary to be consistent in your citations and documentation. You must follow MLA or APA format for quotations, references, and Works Cited (starting on a separate page). Please use endnotes for explanatory purposes only, and do not use footnotes with notations such as "Ibid."

[Grading Scale: A+ = 97-100; A = 94-96; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83; C+ = 77-79; C = 74-76; C- = 70-73; D+ = 67-69; D = 64-66; D- = 60-63; F = below 60.]

**CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS**

September

Wednesday 1st Introduction to Course

Theories of Violence; Theories of Gender

Wednesday 8th The Late-19th Century Criminal Woman: Lombroso and Ferrero

*Men, Women, and Aggression*: Campbell (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9)

Wednesday 15th "Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes": Gilbert

*Women Who Kill*: Jones (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3)

Wednesday 22th *Women Who Kill*: Jones (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7) (Reading Quiz)

Wednesday 29th Violent Women in Contemporary Culture, Literature, Film, and Popular

Culture: *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular* *Culture*: Inness (11-27).

[Each student is to choose and talk briefly (4-5 minutes) about an example of a violent woman in contemporary/pop culture--from film, television, videos, the Internet, zines, the visual arts, music, theater, graphic novels, etc. You are, in addition, to submit a 1-2 page summary of your presentation electronically to me.]

October

Wednesday 6th The Historical and the Filmic Female Adolescent Killer: *Heavenly*

*Creatures*

Wednesday 13th The Historical and the Novelistic Female Killer: *Alias Grace.* Atwood

(Chapters I - VII) (Reading Quiz)

Wednesday 20th The Historical and the Novelistic Female Killer: *Alias Grace.* Atwood

(Chapters VIII - XV) (Reading Quiz)

Wednesday 27th The Filmic Female Killer Imitating Violent Men: *La Femme Nikita*

November

Wednesday 3rdThe Fictional and Filmic Female Killer Parodying Violent Men:

Dandurand, Dé, and Rioux ("The Theft of Jacques Braise"; "Underground Requiem"; "Kill"); *Office Killer*

(Reading Quiz)

Wednesday 10th The Novelistic Female Serial Killer with A Sense of Humor: *Dirty*

*Weekend.* Zahavi

(Reading Quiz)

**Outline and list of outside critical sources due**

Wednesday 17th Female Infanticide--the Andrea Yates Case: *Are You There Alone?*

O'Malley

Wednesday 24 Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class

December

Wednesday 1st The Female Serial Killer--the "Real," the Documentaries, and the

Feature Film: *Aileen Wuornos--the 1992 Interviews; Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer; Monster*

Wednesday 8th "Reporting out" of research papers

What Have We Learned? (Issues, reactions, thoughts, questions raised)

**Research Paper Due**