This course will explore three popular, melodramatic forms which address a specifically female audience—the contemporary Gothic novel, the soap opera, and (most particularly) the "woman's film" of the 1940's. All three forms are centrally concerned with what might be called the interiority of female existence—with woman's confinement within conventional architectural spaces (the home, the hospital, the mental institution), social organizations (marriage, the family, the heterosexual affair), and psychic formations (paranoia, hysteria, masochism). We will examine melodrama both as the formal and emotional extension of this confinement, and as an important vehicle for articulating social and ideological contradiction. We will also study the ways in which all three genres address a female reader or viewer, and attempt to orchestrate female desire. Finally, we will maximize the transgressive and utopian dimensions of the soap opera, the contemporary Gothic romance, and the "woman's film." Course materials will include novels by Phyllis Whitney, Virginia Holt, and Daphne du Maurier, and films by Alfred Hitchcock, Joseph Von Sternberg, King Vidor, Curtis Bernhardt and Anatole Litvak.

FILM LIST (and schematic course outline)

Week 1: Introduction
Week 2: The Contemporary Gothic Romance
Week 3: The Contemporary Gothic Romance
Week 4: The Woman's Film: The Medical Discourse—Curtis Bernhardt's Possessed
Week 5: The Woman's Film: The Medical Discourse—Irving Roger's Now, Voyager
Week 6: The Woman's Film: The Maternal Melodrama—King Vidor's Stella Dallas
Week 7: The Woman's Film: The Maternal Melodrama—Joseph Von Sternberg's Blond Venus

Week 8: The Woman's Film: The Discourse of Paranoia: Alfred Hitchcock's Notorious
Week 9: The Woman's Film: The Discourse of Paranoia: Alfred Hitchcock's Suspicion
Week 10: The Romantic Melodrama: Max Ochuls' Letter from an Unknown Woman
Week 11: The Romantic Melodrama: Charles Vidor's Gilda
Week 12: The Soap Opera
Week 13: The Soap Opera

REQUIRED TEXTS

Doane, Mellencamp, Williams, eds
Modleski, Tania
Fleenor, Juliann E., ed.
Holt, Virginia
Whitney, Phyllis
ReVision
Loving with a Vengeance
The Female Gothic
Manfreya in the Morning
Spindrift
In addition, students will be sold a packet of xeroxed materials

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be expected to read and view all assigned materials, attend class regularly, and participate in class discussions. In addition, they will be asked to write three 5-7 pp. papers. The course grade will be based upon class participation (25%), and the written assignments (75%).

*NOTE: Students must attend 2 of the 3 film screenings each applicable week.