Bara, Theda (1885?-1955) Encyclopedia Article

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Silent screen legend Theda Bara is synonymous with the term "vamp," a wicked woman of exotic sexual appeal who lures men into her web only to ruin them. Bara incarnated that type with her first film, *A Fool There Was* (1915), which attributed to her the famous line, "Kiss me, my fool." With that movie, her name changed from Theodosia to Theda, from Goodman to Bara (chosen as an anagram of Arab), and her star persona was launched. Considered the first movie star, Bara's biography and appearance were entirely manufactured by the studio. Publicized as having been born to a French actress beneath Egypt's Sphinx, the Cincinnati-native wore heavy eye make-up and risqué costumes, the most infamous, a snakeskin-coiled bra. She was the precursor to the femme fatale of 1940s film noir, and careers as diverse as those of Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, and Madonna link back to Bara's.

Further Reading:

Genini, Ronald. *Theda Bara, A Biography of the Silent Screen Vamp with a Filmography.* London, McFarland & Company, 1996.

Golden, Eve. *Vamp: The Rise and Fall of Theda Bara.* New York, Emprise, 1996.