

The American West of the Literary Imagination

This course will examine the ways in which the American West has been imagined and captured in narrative form over the last couple of centuries. Richard Slotkin's theorizing of cultural myths, David Nye's outlining of "second-creation stories," and Fredrick Jackson Turner's historical treatise, together with samples of recent scholarship on region and genre, will provide a historical and critical perspective for our reading of the selected literary texts. Cooper's *The Prairie* depicts pioneers and early settlers venturing into the areas of the "Old West," opened up for settlement by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Wister's novel from 1902 is considered to lay the foundation for the popular genre of the Western. Crane's short story and Cather's novel from about the same time, set in a small town and in a pastoral landscape respectively, present alternative visions of the West of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While Smiley's novel brings us closer to the present time by offering an updated version of the agrarian landscape, Proulx's short stories, one set in the past and the other in our own time, focus on pioneers pitted against the forces of nature and on individuals facing social stigmatization.

Exam format for the course

Take-home exam followed by an oral exam.

Required Reading*

1. Fiction

Print (Books available at Studia)

Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!* 1913. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print. (0199552320)

Smiley, Jane. *A Thousand Acres*. 1991. London: Harper Perennial, 2004. Print. (0006544827)

Wister, Owen. *The Virginian*. 1902. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print. (0199554102)

Online, free access

Crane, Stephen. "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." *McClure's Magazine* 10 (Feb. 1898): 377–84. *U of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center*. Web. 10 Nov. 2013.

<<http://web.archive.org/web/20110111174512/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=CraBrid.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all>>.

Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Prairie: A Tale*. 1827. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876. <<https://archive.org/details/prairie00coopgoog>> [Read online, or find pdf in File Storage]

File Storage, My Page

Proulx, Annie. "Brokeback Mountain." *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*. London: Forth Estate, 1999. 281–318. Print.

———. "Them Old Cowboy Songs." *Fine Just the Way It Is*. London: Forth Estate, 2008. 45–78. Print.

2. *History, Criticism, and Theory*

Online access through the U library: <<http://www.uib.no/ub>>

Nye, David E. "Technology, Nature, and American Origin Stories." *Environmental History* 8.1 (Jan. 2003): 8-24. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Nov. 2013.

Online, free access

Farris, Sara. "American Pastoral in the Twentieth Century: *O Pioneers!*, *A Thousand Acres*, and *Merry Men*." *ISLE* 5.1 (1998): 27-48. *Oxford Journals*. Web. 15 May 2010. <<http://isle.oxfordjournals.org/content/5/1/27.full.pdf>>

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." 1893. *The Frontier in American History*. New York: Henry Holt, 1920. 1-38. Web. *Cornell U Library Archive*. <<https://archive.org/details/cu31924016878013>>. (See esp. 1-4; 11-25; 30-32; 37-38.) [Read online, or find pdf in File Storage]

File Storage, My Page

Barthes, Roland. "Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today." 1971. *Image, Music, Text*. By Roland Barthes. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977. 165-69. Print.

Cawelti, John G. "The Western: A Look at the Evolution of a Formula." *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*. By John G. Cawelti. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976. 192-259. Print. (Excerpts: 192-209, 215-30).

Lyon, Thomas J. "The Literary West." *The Oxford History of the American West*. Ed. Clyde A Milner II, Carola A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss. New York: Oxford, 1994. 707-41. Print.

Slotkin, Richard. "Introduction: The Significance of the Frontier Myth in American History." *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. By Richard Slotkin. New York: Atheneum, 1992. 1-26. Print.

White, Richard. "The Imagined West." *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West*. By Richard White. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1991. 613-32. Print.

Additional Reading for Teacher Program Students (ENG335L/15 credits)*

1. Fiction

Print (Books) (Please note: Studia has *not* been asked to order these titles)

Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. 1988. London: Harper Perennial, 2006. Print. (0007212267)

Proulx, Annie. *That Old Ace in the Hole*. 2002. London: Harper Perennial, 2004. Print. (0007151527)

2. Essays

File Storage, My Page (when the ENG335L module has been established)

Stegner, Wallace. Introduction, "Variations on a Theme by Crèvecoeur," and "The Sense of Place." *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West*. New York: Random House, 1992. xxi-xxviii; 99-116; 199-206. Print.

Momaday, N. Scott. "A First American Views His Land" and "The American West and the Burden of Belief." *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages*. By Momaday. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998. 30-41; 89-107. Print.

* Please Note: Additional required texts may be specified at a later point. A list of recommended additional reading will be provided