

Course Syllabus
English 470W.01 (American Regional
Literatures)
Literature of Texas, Mexico, and the
Southwest Summer I (Mini-semester)
2008

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Texts for the Course:

- *Lone Star Literature*, edited by Don Graham (0-393-32828-7)
- *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy (0-679-74439-8)
- *The Wolf and The Buffalo*, Elmer Kelton (0-87565-058-9)

Note: The ISBN numbers in parentheses, above, are for the specific editions I ordered for the course—the ones that are in the book stores. If you already own any of these books or can find cheaper editions (online or in used book stores), you may use them. It really will not make any difference.

Course Description. English 470 rotates between studies of various American regional literatures. Most frequently, the course has been on Southern literature, but when I teach the course, the focus is the literature of the Southwest, and particular Texas. This time, though, our course is primarily configured by the fact that we are taking it on The Road. Because of that, I have chosen readings that are situated in or that bring our attention to the roads and places we will be travelling through and visiting. I want you to know right up front that we will not be approaching this as a purely literary course, particularly since our companion for this trip will be Dr. Crimm's History 398 course. While the primary focus will be literature, we will also take frequent reading side-trips into southwestern culture—music, landscape, history, legend, food, and folklore. Besides the readings and these side-trips, we will be taking an occasional look at how film intersects with the literature of the southwest (and particularly Texas). Probably the first question we will undertake (and one we will probably continue to address throughout the semester is, just exactly what is meant by the word "Southwest" and then how this applies to the area we will be travelling through. Finally, we will be examining the Frontier as it is evident as a force in the life and literature of West Texas. For our purposes, "West Texas" (and I capitalize the "West" with purposefully) means anything west of the "Blood Meridian" (the 98th Meridian), but actually we will be confining ourselves to two areas: (1) the Hill Country, San Antonio, and south to Victoria, (2) the Texas-Mexico border, along the northern states of Mexico, especially Coahuila, and (3) the frontier fort area of west central Texas, specifically the San Angelo and Abilene area. Of course, this omits far west Texas, or what is referred to as the "Trans-Pecos" region. However, for

the purposes of our reading this area is negligible (though we will read a few pieces set in areas we will not reach in our journey).

Course Goals and Questions. The main thing I'd like for you to try to do is enjoy the readings and discussions during these two weeks. If you do your level best to do that, not much bad can happen, and we'll have a good time of it, plus learning a good deal about the western portions of the state. Other than that, here are the primary objectives we will work toward, along with some questions that will help configure the class and move it from day to day.

- To reach a fuller understanding of West Texas as portrayed across time in literature by Texas writers. Learning Objective: Be able to articulate how the part of Texas we will travel through is defined by our writers and how (or whether) this definition differs from that of other parts of Texas.
- To consider whether West Texas occupies a "special" place in Texas life and literature. What factors explain the mystique of West Texas? Learning Objective: Be able to answer the question of how this section of Texas is viewed differently from other parts of Texas (and the United States).
- To understand the effect of the frontier on life and literature of the section of Texas west of the 98th meridian. Learning Objective: Be able to explain how the "Blood Meridian" was an important historical and geographical line of demarcation in frontier Texas.
- To try to reach an understanding of the borders (legal, physical, and otherwise) that figure so prominently in the Southwest. What do borders mean, and how do they play out in the life and literature of West Texas and Northern Mexico? Learning Objective: Be able to explain the tension that exists between Texas and Mexico and how the borders between the two are more than physical.
- Working off the objective above, to examine conflicts between races on the frontier of Texas. Learning Objective: Be able to discuss the historical place and the place in our literature of Mexicans (including Tejanos), African Americans (especially the Buffalo Soldiers), and Native Americans (especially the Comanche).
- Finally, to understand through experience the connections between Texas literature and the places we will visit, particularly how grounded Texas writers are in their own places. Learning Objective: Be able to articulate how place (current and historical) is vital in the life and literature of West Texas.

The Readings. First of all, you are expected to have the assignment read by the day it appears on the daily schedule (which actually means having read it the day before, or earlier). The readings for this course are considerably less than they would be in a course during the regular semester (or even a summer term). There is only so much that we can read in two weeks. Still, I think that the overall selections will give you a good feel for the literature (and history) of the Texas frontier, as well as how the frontier remains a force in contemporary Texas. Anchoring the course is *Lone Star Literature*, Don Graham's anthology of Texas literature, history, commentary, and autobiography. This book is full of useful and provocative stories and essays about Texas, and we will be

reading from it throughout the term. You will notice that the book is organized along sectional lines, but we will be reading mostly from the sections entitled “The Border” and “The West.” Besides the anthology, we will be reading two novels set in West Texas. The first is Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*. McCarthy, who, from 1978 until 2004, lived in El Paso, has set five novels in the Southwest. *All the Pretty Horses* is the most popular of those (National Book Award in 1992, plus a Miramax/Matt Damon/Penelope Cruz/Billy Bob Thornton film), and—to boot—it is set prominently in San Angelo, Texas. (Most of the novel takes place in northern Mexico, which we will be discussing, but we will be visiting the San Angelo settings in the novel and studying the uncanny degree to which McCarthy uses place in his fiction.) Besides my own interest in McCarthy’s work, I wanted you to have this view of an active “Texas” writer, one who is already being situated among the greatest novelists of our national literature. The other novel we will read is Elmer Kelton’s *The Wolf and The Buffalo*, which is a great storytelling examination of the “Wolf” (the Comanche) and the “Buffalo” (the Native American “Buffalo Soldiers”) in the years following the Civil War. Much of this novel takes place in locations around current San Angelo, especially including Fort Concho, a great old frontier Texas fort which we will visit. Kelton, the author of more than 40 novels, is a resident of San Angelo, and we hope to have a visit with him, in the bargain.

How to Read Them. I am pretty confident that this grouping of novels and readings will keep us talking throughout the two weeks, and I hope you enjoy them all. However, even though the reading is light compared with a regular semester, you still have your work cut out for you. I think you will have plenty of time to read your assignments either on the bus or in camp. In fact, I think you will have plenty of time to read carefully and reflectively (and even slowly, if necessary, and to do some re-reading). However, I would urge you to read ahead as much as possible, especially the novels. (If you could have most of *All the Pretty Horses* read even before we depart, that would be splendid.) I will also provide supplemental readings, which I will place on Blackboard (or make available to you by other means). We will not have internet access for most of the trip, so I will be trying to share materials with you in alternative ways. (If you bring a laptop, please also bring a flash drive.) Whatever you do, don’t put the readings off until the last minute. To do well in the course, you need to read carefully and absorb as much as you can, but in the course requirements and the evaluations, I am placing much more emphasis on reflective readings and responses than on rote memory. Sure, you need to read closely, but it is also important that as you read you think about what you are reading, how it intersects with your own experience and how it helps bring this course into focus. If you’ve read this way, you’ll do fine.

Attendance Policy. Like many other aspects of our Road Trip course, attendance will be a little different from regular courses. Still, there may be a question about attendance beyond just whether you are on the bus. If any “attendance” issues do arise, and goodness knows what they might be, I will take them up at the time. You are required to attend all of the events on our agenda (except some of the evening events). There will be some lectures and some class meetings (of a different kind) on the bus and in camp, but there will also be informal “around-the-campfire” gatherings. The lectures and class meetings are mandatory. The informal gatherings are not, unless I tell you differently.

(though I think they will be fun and at least as edifying as my lectures). In sum, I am not precisely sure how attendance will be defined, but there will be expectations that you will attend all mandatory events. If there is a problem, I will speak with you directly about it.

Course Requirements and Evaluation. I'll be talking in greater detail about all of this, but here is the breakdown of the course requirements.

- **Participation and Daily Grade (25%).** Your participation grade will be made up of a variety of components, but the chief of these will be in daily reading quizzes. You will be subject to reading quizzes every day we have reading assignments. On occasion, I may ask you to write directed responses, in addition to your daily reading journal. You might wonder how much participation in class discussion plays into your participation grade. Well, it does not mean that you will have to be talkative in class. If you're naturally quiet, there are plenty of other ways in which you can demonstrate your consistent and thorough preparedness for class. Finally, there's class attendance, as described above, though I do not expect that to be an issue. This participation grade is not going to seem as neat and clean as a multiple-choice exam in math. However, it will be a judgment based on measurable and consistent inputs, which is what we do every day of our teaching lives. I will keep a good accounting of it, and will give you feedback on how you're doing. The lesson in this is simple—come to “class” every day having read all the material well and having done the assignments, and this participation grade is going to take care of itself just fine.
- **Reading Journal (35%).** I will describe the reading journal in a separate handout, but basically it is precisely what is implied—an informal reading and response journal that is a record of your reading of the material we read and the places we visit and your reflections on them. This is a place for reflection, not essays.
- **Formal Paper (25%).** You will write only one formal paper for this class, due on May 31st. (Actually, since grades are not due until the end of Summer I, I will take your paper after the due date. If you do turn it in on May 31st, it can be saved in a file or hand written.) I'll describe the requirements in much more detail in a separate handout, but—to begin with—it will be a 1200 to 1500 word (5-6 page) paper, with emphasis on your own thinking and your own observations rather than on secondary research. We won't have much opportunity to do library research, but we will be doing a more immediate kind of research in visiting the places we visit. In many ways, this is the best kind of research, though it won't be something you will likely document according to MLA style. “Research,” then, is important in this paper, but it is closer to field research than what you would do in a visit to the library (though you are not precluded from doing traditional secondary research, either during our trip or after).
- **Final Exam (15%).** I am not quite sure what form the final exam will take, but I am fairly positive that it will ask you to synthesize across the readings we have done. There will definitely be a question asking you to compare some aspect, probably thematic but possibly historic, treated in both *All the Pretty Horses* and

The Wolf and the Buffalo. I am fairly sure that the exam will be all essay. It will be comprehensive.

Guidelines for Academic Conduct and Classroom Procedures. Below are official University statements on other aspects of academic conduct and classroom procedures (with a link to the full guidelines). The material in italics is official university language. The non-italized material is my own clarifications or comments on these policies. If you have any questions about any of this, please ask. Though I am required by policy to include these statements, obviously some of them do not apply precisely to our Road Trip. Still, the spirit of these guidelines is in effect, particularly those on academic dishonesty and classroom rules of conduct. If you have a disability that I should know about, you should speak with me before we leave on our trip.

Student Syllabus Guidelines: Following are some official university guidelines for students to know about. There are more detailed descriptions online, as well as links to the specific university policy or procedure.

<https://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Academic Dishonesty: All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. See also the statement on plagiarism, above.

Classroom Rules of Conduct: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process. For the university statement on classroom conduct, see the following:

<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days: Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Students with Disabilities Policy: It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. **NOTE:** no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Visitors in the Classroom: Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

Course Travel, Assignments, and Activities Schedule
English 470 (Regional American Literature, with Emphasis on the Landscape, History, and
Literature of West Texas and The Rio Grande Border)
Summer I Mini-semester, May 2008

Date	Travel	Activity	Assignment
Friday, May 16	10:00 a.m. Pre-departure meeting; Evans 105	Pre-load and last minute announcements	
Saturday, May 17	Depart for Goliad; Arrive Goliad TPWDC Campground and set up camp; (Goliad Base Camp)	Read, rest, and write	ATPH, Book I
Sunday, May 18	To Mission San Jose, San Antonio; (Return to Goliad Base Camp)	Mariachi Mass, Mission San Jose; Museum Tour	ATPH, Book II; LSL: "Commerce Street" and "The Portrait"
Monday, May 19	To Presidio Newton Warzecka and San Juan, Espada, San Antonio; (Return to Goliad Base Camp)	Mission tours	ATPH, Book III; LSL: "The Battle of the Alamo"
Tuesday, May 20	To Victoria; (Return to Goliad Base Camp)	Coastal Bend Museum; Lunch at Frazetti's	ATPH, Book IV; LSL: "from The Last Picture Show" and "La Fabulosa"
Wednesday, May 21	To Del Rio; Visit Fort Clark (One night in Del Rio Day's Inn motel)	Free night	LSL: "The Hammon and the Beans" and "Peace Grove";
Thursday, May 22	Del Rio to San Angelo (KOA Campground Base Camp)	Set up camp; Rest, read, and write; mid- term journal check	Begin <i>The Wolf and the Buffalo</i> ; LSL: "The Texans Touch the Plains" and "Graveyard of the Cowman's Hopes"
Friday, May 23	To Paint Rock, Texas (Return to KOA Base Camp)	Tour Indian Pictograph site; Lowake Steak House (or alternative)	<i>The Wolf and the Buffalo</i> ; LSL: "The Last Running"
Saturday, May 24	To Fort Chadbourne (Return to KOA Base Camp)	Visit Fort Chadbourne	<i>The Wolf and the Buffalo</i> ; LSL: "The Stone Ranch" and "The Girl at Cabe Ranch"
Sunday, May 25	Downtown San Angelo (Return to KOA Base Camp)	Fort Concho and San Angelo sites; Knickerbocker Cemetery	<i>The Wolf and the Buffalo</i> ; LSL "from The Wind" and "The Bride"
Monday, May 26	San Angelo (Return to KOA Base Camp)	Rest, read, and write;	Finish <i>The Wolf and the Buffalo</i>
Tuesday, May 27	To Abilene (Return to KOA Base Camp)	Buffalo Gap and Frontier, Texas	LSL: "North of the Big River"
Wednesday, May 28		Visit author Elmer Kelton and the Cactus Bookstore	LSL: "The Sad Irons" and "Why Texas Is the Way It Is"
Thursday, May 29	To Enchanted Rock	Set up camp	LSL: "What Texas Means to Me"

Friday, May 30	Hike Enchanted Rock	Rest, read, and write	
Saturday, May 31	Return to Huntsville	Final Exam; turn in journal and paper	