

English 365: Formula Westerns in Historical Contexts

Spring 1993

Lectures: L. Mitchell

Seminars: L. Bollinger, W. Hughes, E. Lukens, L. Mitchell

This course explores the emergence and evolution of the formula western--the most enduring and popular form of American fiction. Scholars generally agree that the cowboy western has altered little since its debut, and that the "classics" offer simple variations of a fixed generic structure. We will test that premise by examining the formal structure as well as the historical context of celebrated westerns (both novelistic and cinematic). In denying that a set of narrative "functions" distinguish the western, we will question why such different texts set in a characteristic locale have seemed to resolve ideological issues unrelated to the West--of industrialism, imperialism, adolescence, feminism, and racism, among others.

Assigned Texts:

Clark, Walter Van Tilburg, The Ox-Bow Incident (Signet)
Cooper, James Fenimore, The Last of the Mohicans (Penguin)
Doctorow, E.L., Welcome to Hard Times (Random House)
Grey, Zane, Riders of the Purple Sage (Pocket Books)
Harte, Bret, The Outcasts of Poker Flat (Signet)
L'Amour, Louis, Hondo (Signet)
LeMay, Alan, The Searchers (Jove)
Mark Twain, Roughing It (Penguin)
Wister, Owen, The Virginian (Signet)
Xeroxed Reader (available at Pequod, 6 Nassau St. 921-7888)

Requirements: Two papers (6-7 pp.); final examination; and **active** seminar participation.

1. Feb. 2, Introduction: Turner, the West, and the Western

Frederick Jackson Turner, "Significance of the Frontier" (1893)

* M, Feb. 8, McC 46: George Stevens, Shane (1952)

2. Feb. 9, The Horse Opera Triumphant

Louis L'Amour, Hondo (1953)

3. Feb. 16, Beginnings: Landscape and a Code

James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans (1827)

Umberto Eco, "Narrative Structures in Fleming" (1979)

* M, Feb. 22, McC 66: Sergio Leone, A Fistful of Dollars (1964)

4. Feb. 23, The West: Sublime or Ridiculous?

Mark Twain, Roughing It (1877) to Chap. 62

* M, Mar. 1, McC 46: John Ford, Stagecoach (1939)

5. Mar. 2, Characters of Sentimentality

Bret Harte, The Outcasts of Poker Flat (1870)

* M, Mar. 8, McC 66: George Marshall, Destry Rides Again (1940)

6. Mar. 9, Creating the Formula

Owen Wister, The Virginian (1902)

* M, Mar. 22, McC 66: Ford, Man Who Shot Liberty Valence (1963)

7. Mar. 23, Undoing the Formula

Stephen Crane, "Western Stories" (31-143)

8. Mar. 30, Sex and Space

Zane Grey, Riders of the Purple Sage (1912)

* M, Apr. 5, McC 66: Hawkes, Red River (1947)

9. Apr. 6, Justice and the Rule of Law

Walter Van Tilburg Clark, The Ox-Bow Incident (1940)

Robert Sklar, "Empire to the West: Red River" (1978)

* M, Apr. 12, McC 66: Daves, Broken Arrow (1950)

10. Apr. 13, The Racial Other

Alan LeMay, The Searchers (1953)

* M, Apr. 19, McC 46: Fred Zinnemann, High Noon (1952)

11. Apr. 20, Growing Up

Robert Warshaw, "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner" (1954)

* M, Apr. 26, McC 46: Sam Peckinpah, The Wild Bunch (1969)

12. Apr. 27, The Anti-Western

E.L. Doctorow, Welcome to Hard Times (1960)

* M, May 3, McC 66: Brooks, Blazing Saddles (1974)

Other Literary Westerns:

Karl May, Winnetou (1896)
Andy Adams, The Log of a Cowboy (1903)
Clarence Mulford, Bar 20 (1907)
 Hopalong Cassidy (1910)
Eugene Manlove Rhodes, Bransford in Arcadia (1914)
 "Paso Por Aqui"
Emerson Hough, North of 36 (1923)
Max Brand [Frederick Faust], Destry Rides Again (1930)
Edna Ferber, Cimarron (1930)
Luke Short, War on the Cimarron (1939)
Ernest Haycox, Bugles in the Afternoon (1945)
A.B. Guthrie, The Big Sky
Charles O. Locke, Road to Socorro
Edward Abbey, The Brave Cowboy (1956)
Paul I. Wellman, Jubal Troop
Tom Lea, The Wonderful Country
Jack Schaefer, Monte Walsh (1966)
Frederick Manfred, Riders of Judgment (1957)
Charles Portis, True Grit
Larry McMurtry, Horseman, Pass By (1961)
 Lonesome Dove (1985)
Elmore Leonard, Valdez is Coming

Other Cinematic Westerns:

Edwin S. Porter, The Great Train Robbery (1903)
William S. Hart, Hell's Hinges (1915)
Victor Fleming, The Virginian (1929) rginian (1929)
John Ford, The Iron Horse (1924)
 My Darling Clementine (1946)
 Fort Apache (1948)
 She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949)
 The Searchers (1956)
 Sergeant Rutledge (1960)
Raoul Walsh, In Old Arizona (1929)
 The Big Trail (1930)
Cecil B. de Mille, Union Pacific (1937)
William Wyler, The Westerner (1940)
William Wellman, The Oxbow Incident (1941)
*King Vidor, Duel in the Sun (1945)
Howard Hawkes, Red River (1948)
Arthur Penn, The Left-Handed Gun (1948)
Henry King, The Gunfighter (1950)
Nicholas Ray, Johnny Guitar (1954)
Anthony Mann, The Man from Laramie (1955)
Marlon Brando, One-Eyed Jacks (1959)
John Sturges, The Magnificent Seven (1961)
David Miller, Lonely Are the Brave (1962)

Sam Peckinpah, Ride the High Country (1962)
Elliott Silverstein, Cat Ballou (1964)
Sergio Leone, Once Upon a Time in the West (1967)
Martin Ritt, Hombre (1967)
Tom Kries, Will Penny (1968)
Mel Brooks, Blazing Saddles
Henry Hathaway, True Grit (1969)
Andy Warhol, Lonesome Cowboys (1969)
George Roy Hill, Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid (1969)
*Arthur Penn, Little Big Man (1970)
Robert Altman, McCabe and Mrs. Miller (1971)
Robert Ulrich, Ulzana's Raid (1972)
Michael Cimino, Heaven's Gate (1982)
"Young Guns" (1988)

Secondary Texts:

Christine Bold, Selling the Wild West (1987)
Douglas Branch, The Cowboy and His Interpreters (1926)
John Cawelti, The Six-Gun Mystique (1970)
Adventure, Mystery, Romance (1976)
Richard Etulain & Michael Marsden, Popular Western (1974)
James K. Folsom (ed.), The Western (1979)
Christopher Frayling, Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone.
Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape (1974)
Daryl Jones, The Dime Novel Western (1978)
John R. Milton, The Novel of the American West (1980)
Wm. Pilkington, Essays on the Western American Novel (1980)