

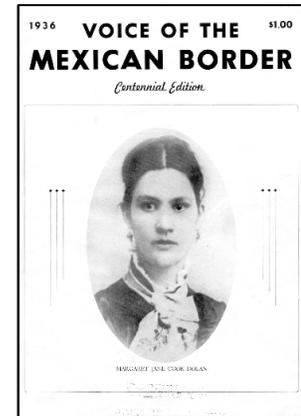
English 5302: Reading and Writing the Big Bend

Dr. Barney Nelson
Fall 2008
Office Phone: 432-837-8154

Office: MAB 112
Office Hours: MW 9-11, TT 9:30-11:30; or by appointment
bnelson@sulross.edu

Required Texts:

- 1) McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian* (novel)
- 2) Bowden, Keith. *The Tecate Journals* (excursion)
- 3) Nelson, Barney. *God's Country or Devil's Playground* (nature writing)
- 4) Smithers, W. D. *Chronicles of the Big Bend: A Photographic Memoir of Life on the Border* (literary journalism/ethnoiconography/etc.)
- 5) Clothier, Patricia W. *Beneath the Window* (back country living)
- 6) Jones, Trent and Carlton Stowers. *Terlingua Teacher* (memoir)



Course objectives--student will be able to:

- # analyze various genres of writing about the Big Bend
- # develop archival research skills and understand legal parameters for using material from archive collections
- # develop strategies for archival research and anthology collections
- # evaluate literary quality of place-based regional writing including folklore, local color, narrative history, diary, biographical sketch, humor, essay, historical drama, nonfiction poetry
- # analyze and apply modern literary criticism theories to regional nonfiction literature
- # analyze and target regional publishers
- # learn proper form and copyright laws regarding submission of archival material for publication
- # develop a Big Bend sense of place

Course Philosophy: One of the ground-breaking texts that helped to jump start the current flurry of interest in nature writing, environmental literature, and ecocriticism was Thomas J. Lyon's *This Incomparable Land* (1989) in which he outlined a "taxonomy" of the various genres found in nature writing. This course will attempt to create a "taxonomy" of Big Bend regional writing. Regional studies have also undergone recent scrutiny by scholars but with most of the emphasis on regional fiction. This class will especially attempt a taxonomy of regional nonfiction. What types of interesting prose has the Big Bend produced? Can modern literary criticism—race, class, gender, ecocriticism, multiple voices, power structures, boundary crossing—illuminate that prose for deeper appreciation or understanding? Students will be expected to familiarize themselves with current literary criticism, however they will also be encouraged to use their own "fresh eyes" as they search for new scholarly approaches to various types of regional nonfiction prose.

Explanation of Major Assignments and Grading

20% - Six Response Papers - students will write a one-page, single-spaced response paper to each of the readings which will be due at the beginning of class when those readings are to be discussed. Papers will be graded on a point system with 5 points high and 0 points low. (Note: McCarthy & Smithers are due the first week-end.)

20% - Class Anthology - students will choose an unpublished archives manuscript (letter) from a list provided by the professor, type it, research and provide a "header" about the author, including comments on the writing/historical moment, a photograph of the author, and one additional visual (photo of place, map, something mentioned). All sources must be formally MLA documented citing all archival research

sources both in-text and in a formal Works Cited. Due electronically and via hard copy week #2. Submission will be holistically graded with A-F assigned.

30% - Creative/Research Paper on “Frontier Genre” - students will choose a nonfiction genre topic (from a list provided by the professor: letters, biographical sketch, memoir, literary journalism, etc.) and produce either a formal research paper, conference paper, teaching unit, or article for publication. Student will combine current literary criticism, their own interpretations, and examples from the archives. Paper will include a minimum of five pages of text and three visuals with all sources formally MLA documented both in-text and in a formal Works Cited. Due: rough draft by mail or email to professor prior to week #3. Final draft is due week #4 and oral presentation to class. Papers will be graded holistically with A-F assigned. Oral presentations (10% of grade) will be peer graded.

20% - Book Report - students will read one more book from Big Bend authors in the same genre as their research on Big Bend (from a list provided), give an oral presentation on it to the class, and provide the professor with a one-page, single-spaced annotated bibliography (1/2 page recap and ½ page of your own comments). Due week-end #4. Oral presentations will be peer graded. Each portion will fulfill 1/2 the total grade.

10% - Class Participation - all graduate students are expected to attend all classes, participate in class discussions, bring additional materials to share with the class, and in general be an active participant in the learning process. Professor will assign grade A-F.

Tentative Schedule

September 6 and 7- First Week-end - BORDER CONFLICTS AND CULTURE

Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*; W. D. Smithers, *Chronicles of the Big Bend: A Photographic Memoir of Life on the Border*

Discussion: Intro to letters project and archival research. Intro to literary criticism of nonfiction writing, analysis of intended audience and intended level of “truth.” Also entradas, border conflicts, Indians, Texas rangers, scalp hunters, Chamberlain’s *Confessions*, bandits, Brite Ranch raid, Glenn Springs, Ft. Leaton, regeneration through violence, stereotypes of Hispanic characters, “El Fotografo,” corridos, smuggling, curanderos, avisadores, mining, natural housing, cavalry, mule trains, airplanes, Marxism and influence of stories on culture, reading images, borders and sense of self, novel, autoethnography, literary journalism, creating anthologies.

September 27 and 28 - Second Week-end – NATURE AND TOURISM

Barney Nelson ed., *God’s Country or Devils’s Playground: The Best Nature Writing from the Big Bend of Texas*; Keith Bowden, *The Tecate Journals*

Discussion: Intro to taxonomy of nature writing. Also photography, nature, tourism, hunters, trappers, BBNP, schools, ghosts, lost mines, hardships, rock art, trails, hot springs, journals, Miles’ books, Orientalism, ecocriticism, using field guides, layering, folklore, memoir, autobiography.

October 18 and 19 - Third Week-end – RANCHING AND EDUCATION

Patricia Wilson Clothier, *Beneath the Window: Early Ranch Life in the Big Bend Country*; Trent Jones and Carlton Stowers, *Terlingua Teacher*.

Discussion: Intro to local color writing, regionalist writing. Also ranching, female ranchers, fences and corrals, railroad shipping, water witching, livestock publications, livestock

associations, predators, windmills, rain/drouth, nonfiction prose, storytelling, analysis of regional publishers, copyright, releases, publication forms, targeting publishers.

November 8 and 9 - Fourth Week-end - PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH – We will take a field trip into the Big Bend (TBA) to visit sites where the research happened. Students will present research and book reports. Access to technology will probably be impossible, so be creative—posters? Flip books? Dramatization? Costumes? We may also invite additional audience. We attempt to present the research from the site where it occurred.

Readings and Response Paper Questions:

This assignment should be prepared during and immediately following completion of each reading. It is due at the beginning of the class as a discussion prompt.

\$ each paper should be single-spaced, 12 pt. type

\$ at the top of the page, give a formal MLA citation

\$ first, use 2 the page to answer the question given below

\$ then, choose a favorite passage and explain why you like it for 1/4 page.

\$ then, pose a question for further study, discussion, or research and explain why you think it is an important question for 1/4 page.

There are no right/wrong answers here. I want you to develop your own interpretations and ideas. The response paper is designed to be a catalyst for class discussion. Be sure to include page numbers for citation from the text (see sample response paper attached).

Questions for Reading Responses

Sept. 6 9:00 McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*: McCarthy is often touted for his ability to use beautiful language to describe the macabre. Some critics say his style mixes the long, dense sentences of Faulkner with the minimalist dialogue of Hemingway. Discuss McCarthy's use of language.

Sept. 7 8:00 Smithers, W. D. *Chronicles of the Big Bend: A Photographic Memoir of Life on the Border*: This is probably the Aclassic@ Big Bend book. Discuss what makes this book stand out among others (or why you think it is over-rated).

Sept. 27 9:00 Nelson, Barney. *God's Country or Devil's Playground*. Choose 4 pieces and explain why you think these are great (or terrible or a mix) examples of Big Bend nature writing. Although the professor is the editor, she is NOT the author, and the collection is intended to be “evaluated” and used as a teaching tool. So don’t feel intimidated about criticizing some of the entries if that is your opinion.

Sept. 28 8:00 Bowden, Keith. *Tecate Journals*: Discuss the relationships you see between the author and various types of people he interacts with along the border (fellow travelers, law officers, Hispanics, even dead people).

Oct. 18 9:00 Clothier, Patricia. *Beneath the Window*: Would you classify Clothier's book as regional literary memoir, local color memoir, or something else. Justify your answer.

Oct. 19 8:00 Jones and Stowers. *Terlingua Teacher*: The judge in McCarthy's book is often portrayed as an "educator" – discuss (you may but not required to compare/contrast with The Judge) the way educators are represented in this book.