Spring 1-15-2004

ENG 3504-001: Film and Literature: Reading the American West in Film and Lit

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Course Description:
Many define the western as “a film [or literary work] set in the western United States between 1860 and 1900 and involving as its central theme the contrast between garden and desert” (Tudor 4). Westerns seem recognizable with conventions like gun fights, white and black hats, and revenge themes, but even though these conventions come to life in some westerns, they are parodied and deconstructed in others. By examining traditional and revisionist western films and novels, this course will explore the American West in film and literature and, I hope, complicate visions of the genre.

Texts:
Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!*
Cooper, James F. *The Last of the Mohicans*
Grant, Barry Keith, Editor. *Film Genre Reader II*
Grey, Zane. *Riders of the Purple Sage*
Schaefer, Jack Warner. *Shane*
Group novel

Course Requirements:
1. **Weekly Responses and Participation:** Responses are about two pages typed and reflect careful reading and synthesis of course materials and/or films. Your responses will serve as a source for discussion in class as a whole or in small groups so are part of your participation grade. Responses should analyze, critique, argue for or against, or evaluate—they should not summarize except to make the writer’s point(s). **You must be in class to receive credit for your response or for any in-class work.**
2. **Midterm Exam:** This exam will provide an opportunity to internalize material all students read for class and to carefully read the first four films in the class.
3. **Group Novel Teaching and Presentation:** Because so few Western novels are available in textbook rental, members of four different groups will each read a Western and be responsible for teaching it to the rest of the class (with my help).
4. **Final Exam:** This exam will not be cumulative. It will provide an opportunity to internalize material read for class as a group and as a class from Midterm forward and carefully to read the last three films in the class.
5. **Final Paper and Presentation:** This paper will expand on the best thoughts of your best response, either to one of the films or to your group’s novel. I will provide a handout to clarify requirements for this paper and comments on your response to help stimulate best idea development. Presentations will give you the opportunity to share your thoughts with your classmates.
Grades: Grades will be determined as follows for a total of 100%:

Weekly Responses and Participation-------------------------- 20%
Midterm---------------------------------------------------20%
Group Teaching/Presentation----------------------------------20%
Final Exam--------------------------------------------20%
Final Paper-----------------------------------------------20%

Grading of Responses, Presentation, and Paper:

Response grades will be based on analytical complexity. Each will be worth twenty points. If a response only summarizes a film or novel, the response gets only half credit. Adequate analysis (or argument or critique) will result in 14 points (C level). Good analysis, etc., in 16 points (B level). Great analysis, etc., from 18-20 points, depending on clarity, precision, and sense of voice.

Paper grades will be based on the following areas: Audience awareness, organization, development, sentence structure, word choice, grammar/usage/mechanics. The first three areas will be weighted more heavily than the second three (60% vs. 40%). I will also distribute the English Department’s grade analysis in class.

Presentations will be evaluated according to a rubric I will distribute in class. Groups should also turn in any class handouts or visuals with novel responses.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Plagiarism: The English Department states, "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism -- 'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' -- has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of "F" in the course."

Electronic Writing Portfolio: This class is a writing intensive class, so you may submit your paper as a writing portfolio sample, following the instructions on the CASL Website. Submissions must be made during the course of the class to receive my approval. Please note that the Writing Center is available for help with all writing assignments, as well. Take advantage of this free service.
Tentative Course Calendar  
Spring 2004

January

14 Introduction to Course and to the western genre. Watch *The Great Train Robbery*. Talk about Responses, Group Presentations and papers (from assignment sheets). Read *The Last of the Mohicans* for 1/28—Make sure you keep on track! You will be quizzed on the novel. Read Douglas Pye’s “The Western (Genre and Movies)” in FGR for 1/21 (187-202).

21 Watch *Stage Coach* in Coleman Auditorium. Analyze the film in terms of genre expectations outlined in the Pye reading—**In Class Response**. Group I: Read A Zane Grey Novel from choices I provide (and libraries) and explore author bio. for February 4. Finish *The Last of the Mohicans* for 1/28 and write a response.


February

4 **Zane Grey group presentation and group response due.** Genre reading comparison. Watch Sergio Leone film—the Spaghetti Western. Is it revisionist or traditional? Read *O! Pioneers* for 4/11 (it’s short) and write a response.

11 **Response to novel due.** Discuss Cather, gender and the American West and watch clips from the Hallmark Hall of Fame episode. Group II: The Searchers and Alan LeMay (who also wrote *The Unforgiven*) should prepare for 2/18 presentation. Read selections from FGR (chapters 1 - 3) and Slotkin handout for 2/18.

18 Watch *Westward the Women!* Group II will present Alan LeMay and *The Searchers*. Read selections from FGR (chapters 4 and 5) for 2/25.

25 Watch *The Searchers*. **In-class response on film and novel presentation.** Discuss novels and other readings in preparation for Midterm.

March

3 **Midterm/ Western Parodies and comedies (including Daffy Duck):** Read *Shane* for 3/12. Group III should prepare to present Elmore Leonard and his works on 3/24.
12 Response to *Shane* due. Discuss responses and works so far. Watch *Pale Rider* and discuss connections to *Shane*. Write a response to film for 3/24.

15-19 Spring Break


31 Response to *Hombre* due. Introduce L'Amour and pulp Westerns—talk about dime novels, etc. to historicize genre. Group IV should prepare to present Edmond Naughton and *McCabe* on 4/14.

April

7 *Riders of the Purple Sage* response due. Discuss novel and watch part of *Crossfire Trail* and film version of novel.

14 Group IV presentation and response due. *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*—and cinematography.

21 Response to film, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* due. Discuss film and wrap up genre. Guest presenter? Read 2 chapters from FGR by group to complete last 8—be prepared to present to class.

28 Final Paper due—an expansion of one of your responses. Discuss genre readings and their implications for Western genre. Talk about (and view clips from) contemporary westerns. Get hand-out to prepare for final exam.

Final Exam