

Course Syllabus
English 470W.01 (American Regional Literatures)
Literature of Texas, Mexico, and the Borderlands
Fall 2010; Credit hours: 03

Class Meeting: Evans 417, Tuesday and Thursday 2:00 to 3:20 p.m.

Prof.: Dr. Gene Young; **Office:** Evans 416

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30 to 12:30 and 3:30 to 4:30 **Or by appointment.**

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Texts for the Course:

- *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter.* Katherine Anne Porter. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1979). ISBN 9780156188760. (Original Publication date: 1965).
- *The Last Picture Show.* Simon & Schuster (1999). Larry McMurtry. ISBN: 9780684853864. (Original publication date: 1966).
- *Woman Hollering Creek* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing 1992). Sandra Cisneros. ISBN: 9780679738565. (Original publication date: 1991).
- *Like Water for Chocolate.* Laura Esquivil. (Translated into English by Thomas Christensen). (Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 1995). ISBN: 9780385420174. (Original publication date: 1992).
- *All the Pretty Horses.* Cormac McCarthy. (Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 1993). ISBN: 9780679744399. (Original publication date: 1992).
- *The Crossing.* Cormac McCarthy. (Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 1995). ISBN: 9780679760849. (Original publication date: 1995).

Note: The publisher, publication date, and ISBN numbers above are for the specific editions I ordered for the course—the ones 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. You'll just be at a slight inconvenience if your pagination differs from the standard editions.

Course Description. English 4370 rotates between studies of various American regional literatures. Most frequently, the course has been on Southern literature, but the subject for our course is the literature of the Southwest, specifically Texas, Mexico, and the Borderlands. Although we will be concerned with the larger world of Southwestern literature, our concentration will be on Texas, northern Mexico, and the Borderlands. Also, while the primary focus will be literature, we will also take side-trips into southwestern culture—music, landscape, history, legend, food, and folklore—and we will watch films and excerpts from films made about these and other books. Probably the first question we will undertake (and one we will probably continue to address throughout the semester is, just exactly distinguishes “Southwest” from other parts of the country). Yes, this is an American literature course, but we will have plenty of occasion to engage Southwestern culture. How could we not?

Official Catalog Description. **ENG 4370 American Regional Literature.** [ENGL 4370] Selected representative Southern/Southwestern writers. Readings will emphasize works of artistic merit, but they may include ancillary material such as folklore, "local color," and historical documents for background study. Prerequisites: ENG 164, 165, either 265 or 266, and 3 hrs. of ENG 300-level. Credit 3.

Course Goals and Questions. The main thing I'd like for you to try to do is enjoy the readings and discussions this semester. If you do your level best to do that, not much bad can happen, and we'll have a good time of it this semester, plus learning a good deal about the region we inhabit (if east Texas can, indeed, be called southwestern). Other than that, here are the primary objectives that I hope you will work toward, along with some questions that will help configure the class and move it from week to week.

- To reach a fuller understanding of the Southwest as portrayed across time in literature by Southwestern writers. According to Southwestern writers, just what is the Southwest, and what do they have to say about it?
- To trace and discuss the intersections (or disjuncture) between Southwestern literature and the larger national literature of America. Is the writing in the Southwest different in important ways from the literature of other regions?
- To examine the core issues and ideas that Southwestern writers identify and keep coming back to? What things do Southwestern writers care about most and does their thinking intersect with that of the general population?
- To consider whether Texas occupies a "special" place in Southwestern life and literature. Is Texas really a "whole 'nother country, or are we just full of hot air?
- 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 Southwestern American and Northern Mexico? Also, where does the South end and the Southwest begin?

The Readings. In selecting the novels for our course, I tried for a collection that would give us a somewhat comprehensive grasp of the literature *and culture* of the Southwest, seen through the lens of Texas, Mexico, and the Borderlands. Our first author for the course, Katherine Anne Porter, is Texas' most prominent "High Art" literary figure, and reading her stories gives us a good vantage from which to discuss the "South versus Southwest" issue, as well as Mexico from the perspective of a *gringa* on assignment in a foreign land. We will read most of her short stories and her justly famed *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* trilogy of "long stories." Larry McMurtry's *The Last Picture Show* (which is a little steamy) provides one of the defining statements of 20th-century small-town Texas (and was made into a blockbuster Academy Award winning film, which we will view.) Our third book-length reading will be Sandra Cisneros's fine collection, *Woman Hollering Creek*. Cisneros, another "move-in" to Texas, is a master at the techniques of literary

voice, and she also represents Mexican culture on both sides of the border, from the perspective of an outsider who is also an insider. In Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, we will encounter a compelling view of Mexican life and culture, particularly as informed by Mexican foodlore as a traditional centerpiece of Mexican family life. This novel, originally in Spanish, is also pretty steamy. (If your copy is titled *Como Agua Para Chocolate*, you have the Spanish language version. Go trade it in for the English one. Of course, if you read Spanish, you could read it in both languages.) Cormac McCarthy provides two of the six books—the first two novels of his Border Trilogy (*All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*). 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 considered among the greatest novelists of our national literature. This will be an interesting set of readings for you. We will basically be reading the books in the order of the original publications dates: Porter, McMurtry, Cisneros, Esquivil, McCarthy/McCarthy.

How to Read Them. I am confident that this grouping of novels and readings will keep us talking throughout the semester, and I hope you enjoy them all. I am allotting two weekly class meetings per novel. I believe this will give you plenty of time to read carefully and reflectively (and even slowly, if necessary, and to do some re-reading). Interspersed in the reading will be supplemental readings, discussions, daily work activities, and, especially, films. I've scheduled the reading assignments as best I can, but some weeks will be heavier than others. Actually, you're better off reading out ahead as much as possible. 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 in this course.

Attendance Policy. First of all, I take class attendance seriously, and I'll take roll every meeting. University policy allows you three hours of absences, which for twice-a-week classes, means only two meetings. I'll give you those two absences, no questions asked (although this does not excuse you from any course requirements during that time). If you don't miss at all, I'll give you bonus points in your participation grade. If your absences are excessive, there will be deductions from your daily grade. Class attendance is factored directly into the participation grade, described below. It may be possible that I could excuse an absence, but to be fair to everyone, absences are going to come basically under the old insurance policy descriptor of bad luck, calamities, or accidents that, while understandable and regrettable, still have to be counted against you. That's the cleanest, fairest way to deal with the issue of absences.

Makeup Writings for Absences. For any absence—whether or not it is excused—you are required to write a two- to three-page make-up in which you (1)

summarize the reading for the day you missed and (2) write an overall analysis of and response to the assigned reading. This response is to be clearly labeled (such as MAKE-UP FOR SEPTEMBER 13), and you will hand it to me in hard copy on the day your return to class. If you don't do these make-ups you will lose points from your participation grade.

Course Requirements and Evaluation. For each component of the course, you will be provided a description of both the assignment and the evaluation criteria I will be using. The breakdown for letter grades is as follows:

- A – 90% or above
- B – 80% to 89.9%
- C – 70% to 79.9%
- D – 60% to 69.9%
- F – Below 60%

Extra credit is not available. All of the course grades except daily grade components will be posted on Blackboard. I am happy to discuss your grades at any point of the semester. Below is the breakdown of course requirements.

- **Participation, Short Assignments, and Daily Work (50%).** Your participation grade will be made up of a variety of components, the main one of which will be the short, semi-formal **reflection papers**. I'll describe these in more detail in a separate handout. Another portion will be a semi-formal activity—a **historical/cultural background paper** delivered in a 5 to 10 minute discussion-starter on some aspect of Southwestern history or culture pertinent to the readings we are doing. (More on this in a separate handout.) On occasion, I may ask you to write **in-class or out-of-class responses**, in addition to the reflection papers. I may also give short reading quizzes over the week's reading assignments. Another component will be your participation in any **Blackboard discussion groups** or online discussions we might do. 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 (such as the responses or Blackboard discussions) in which you can demonstrate your consistent and thorough preparedness for class. Finally, there's **class attendance**, as described above. It's not the overriding factor, but it's important. If you don't miss any classes, you'll get a boost to your participation grade. If you miss more than three, there will be deductions. Miss more than five and deduction is more severe. 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 (especially early on and at mid-term) on how you're doing. The lesson in this is simple—come to class faithfully having read all the material well and

having done the assignments, and this participation grade is going to take care of itself just fine. As you can see from this, taking active part is the most important component in this class.

- **Formal Papers (35%).** You will write two papers for this class. (See the class schedule for due dates.) I'll describe the requirements in much more detail later on, but—to begin with—the first paper (which will make up 15% of your grade) will be a 1200 to 1500 word (4-5 page) paper, with emphasis on your own thinking and your own observations rather than on secondary research. The second paper (which will count 20% of your grade) will be a more formal paper and will require some minimal research.
- **Final Exam (15%).** My practice in this course is to minimize exams. There will be only one, a final exam which will count 15% of your final grade. It will not be a comprehensive exam, and I will be looking for alternatives to the standard Fright Night final exam. I will provide you plenty of preparation for the final exam and its content.

Computer Skills and Using Blackboard. We will be making fairly considerable use of Blackboard this semester. For each of the fifteen weeks of there will be a Blackboard folder that will explain all the requirements for the week, along with instructions about how to do them. I will load several websites and other material in the folders, and you will be responsible for viewing them just the same as the readings. You should go online and begin to familiarize yourself with the features of Blackboard if you're not already familiar with it. You aren't going to have to be a computer nerd to take part. If you need help with any aspect of Blackboard, just call on me.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism means taking words or ideas from a source without giving proper credit to that source. There are different types of plagiarism, ranging from relatively innocent to serious. However, plagiarism is—generally—taking ideas or statements (whether quoted or not) from a source without properly and clearly citing or crediting that source. The opportunities and temptations to plagiarize (especially on the internet) have become much more available, but there are also increasing ways for plagiarists to be caught at it. Whatever the case, plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and I do not take it lightly. (Neither does the University. See the student guidelines for a discussion of the penalties of plagiarism.) The long and short of this message is simple: Don't do it. If you work hard and do the work yourself, I'll give you every benefit of the doubt, and I'll help you as much as you need it. It won't be hard to write your own papers, and you'll have plenty of help with them. Just sweat it out and do the work yourself. I guarantee it is better that way.

Course Assessment. Toward the end of the term, you will do an "IDEA" assessment of the course. These evaluations are a part of our faculty evaluation system, but even if we didn't do them, I take student evaluation seriously. In

addition to the formal university teaching evaluation, I will be seeking feedback from you about the course.

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-italicized material is my own clarifications or comments on these policies. If you have any questions about any of this, please ask. They are required to appear on each syllabus by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

- *The official university Code of Student Conduct and Discipline:*
<https://netreg.shsu.edu/mirror/codeofconduct.html>
- *University guidelines and policies on Academic Dishonesty, Americans with Disabilities Act, Absences for Religious Holy Days, and Visitors in the Classroom:* <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>
- *University policy on Academic Dishonesty:*
<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/728eec25-f780-4dcf-932c-03d68cade002.pdf>

My Classroom Policies. I'm not especially fussy about what you do in class. Don't fall asleep, and do not leave early unless you have cleared it with me first. It doesn't bother me if you are a little late to class on occasion, but if you are late, make sure you check after class to see that I got you marked present. The one thing that has become an issue with me and many other faculty is the use of cell phones and laptops (and other electronic devices) during class. Please avoid constant checking of your cell phone during class. That can wait. Also, don't use a laptop during class, unless you have discussed with me how you intend to be using it. I may require some proof that you are doing class-related things. That's about it. Mainly, just come to class prepared and ready to take part.

Well, that's about it. Let me say in closing here that I sincerely hope you enjoy the readings and the class this semester. I am available to talk with you about anything you like—to critique drafts of your papers or to talk over how you're doing in the class—any time you want to. Just send me a message or drop by anytime. I'm happy to see you.

English 4370 American Regional Literature

-- Texas, Mexico, and the Borderlands --

Spring 2018

Meeting Date Readings, Assignments, and Important Dates

Week One. First Class Meeting (January 18)	Introduction to the Course. Texas and the Southwest; Movies about Texas (view scenes from <i>Giant</i> , <i>The Alamo</i> , and other Texas films); Read the first 9 pages of <i>The Crossing</i> before the first class meeting.
Week Two (January 23 and 25). <i>Our Own Katherine the Great</i>	Online Background Assignments. Begin reading from <i>The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter</i> : “María Concepción” (3-21), “Virgin Violeta” (22-32), “The Martyr” (33-38), “Magic” (39-41), “That Tree” (66-79)
Week Three (Jan. 30-Feb. 1). <i>The KAP Short Story Legend</i>	Reading: KATHERINE ANNE PORTER: “Flowering Judas” (90-102), “Rope” (42-48), “He” (49-58), “Theft” (59-65) and “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” (80-89).
Week Four (Feb. 6 and 8). <i>Porter’s Fictional Aristocracy</i>	Continue KATHERINE ANNE PORTER —Read the long stories from <i>Pale Horse, Pale Rider</i> . “Old Mortality” (173-221), “Noon Wine” (222-68), and “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” (269-317)
Week Five (February 13 and 15). <i>Larry’s Bad Boys</i>	LARRY MCMURTRY— <i>The Last Picture Show</i> . Read the entire novel (280 pages)
Week Six (February 20 and 22). <i>The Film Legacy</i>	Finish discussing the book and view scenes from <i>The Last Picture Show</i> and <i>Lonesome Dove</i> .
Week Seven (February 27 and March 1). <i>The Voice/La Voz</i>	SANDRA CISNEROS— <i>Woman Hollering Creek</i> ; read and discuss the entire collection (165 pages).
Week Eight (March 6 and 8). <i>Mexican Foodlore and Story Magic</i> .	LAURA ESQUIVEL— <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> . Read the novel (241 pages)
March 12-16: Spring Break	

Week Nine (March 20 and 22). <i>LWforC on Film: Rated R.</i>	Finish discussing <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> ; Film: <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i>
Week Ten (March 27 and 29). <i>The Border Trilogy Begins.</i>	CORMAC MCCARTHY— <i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , Books I and II.
Week Eleven (April 3 and 5). <i>John Grady Cole: Between the Wish and the Thing.</i>	Finish <i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , Books III and IV. Watch selected scenes of the film.
Week Twelve (April 10 and 12). <i>Wolves and Legend.</i>	Presentation on Mexican history and culture. Selections from AMERICO PAREDES <i>With His Pistol in His Hand</i> . Film: <i>The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez</i> . The Mexican <i>corrido</i> . For Thursday, begin reading <i>The Crossing</i> . (Book I—through page 128).
Week Thirteen (April 17 and 19). <i>The Making of a Mexican Corrido.</i>	CORMAC MCCARTHY—continue <i>The Crossing</i> (Books III and IV, pages 129-332).
Week Fourteen (April 24 and 26).	Finish reading <i>The Crossing</i> (Book IV, pages 333-426). Online reading:
Week Fifteen (May 1 and 3)	Finish: View selections from films based on McCarthy's novels (<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , <i>No Country for Old Men</i> , and <i>The Road</i>). Preview the final exam.
Tuesday May 8: 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.	Final Meeting