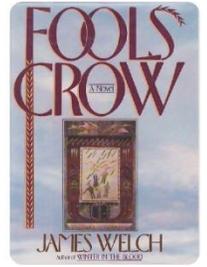
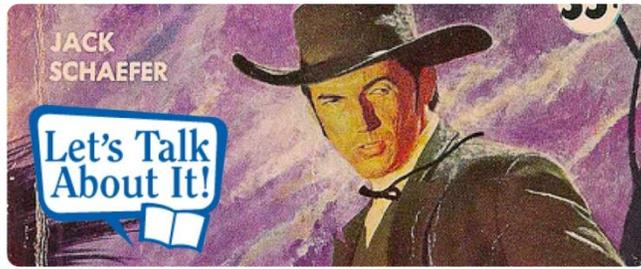


Western Fiction



Theme Essay -- Why Am I Reading This?

The West. For many, the West is more than a direction found on a compass, even more than a geographical location found on a map. The word carries connotations, snippets, and images from a host of sources that all go into making up an imaginative collage of the West: a water hole from a Louis L'Amour novel; a Remington statue; a line ("Smile when you say that") from Wister's *The Virginian*; the ubiquitous over-the-bar painting of "Custer's Last Stand"; a postcard of a jackalope; a dim flicker from a Saturday afternoon movie when Roy or Gene or The Duke rode into town in the first reel, sized up the problem, saved the day, and rode off into the sunset in the last reel.

The works chosen for this series don't fit this traditional or mythic mold of the West, but they do reflect the West. While they don't challenge our larger-than-life view of the West in the way that Cat Ballou or Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* does, they add to and enrich the picture by giving us different, and perhaps even new, experiences.

The chosen books have historical settings from the 1880's (Billy the Kid) to the 1970's (Angle of Repose); a variety of geographical locations from the Southwest to the Rocky Mountains to California; and physical landscapes encompassing desert, mountain, valley, and plains. They focus on a variety of individuals—some representing the traditional western character: cowboy, heroine, outlaw, homesteader; some not so traditional: the downtrodden and a normal middle class family; and a variety of cultures: white, European, Native American, and Hispanic.

Within this diversity, however, a common thread runs through the books: the ways in which individuals confront and deal with an alien culture and a sometimes inhospitable land. Whether depicting the pursuit of the American dream, attempts to start a new life, or struggles to hold onto traditional ways, the books in this series help create a fuller, more complete picture of the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions that ultimately make up the West. They may be "the lasting lines...to be looked on again and again."

Developed by Dr. James Hadden, Professor, Boise State University (1986)

Book List

Contemporary Western Fiction:

1. *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* by Robert Utley
2. *Buffalo Girls* by Larry McMurtry
3. *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko
4. *English Creek* by Ivan Doig
5. *Fool's Crow* by James Welch
6. *Jackalope Dreams* by Mary Clearman Blew
7. *Reservation Blues* by Sherman Alexie
8. *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver
9. *The Brave Cowboy* by Edward Abbey
10. *The Professor's House* by Willa Cather

Classics of Western Fiction:

1. *Angle of Repose* by Wallace Stegner
2. *Honey in the Horn* by Harold L. Davis
3. *Shane* by Jack Schaefer
4. *Sometimes A Great Notion* by Ken Kesey
5. *The Virginian* by Owen Wister