The West and America
Fall 2007

Assignment 2

• First draft (leave a copy in my box, and send copies to your peer reviewers) due Tuesday, October 23
• Second draft (with a copy of the first draft with my comments) due Tuesday, October 29

In the first paper, I wanted you to try to deal deeply with one text – a technique that we in the literary game call “close reading.” The idea behind close reading is, not surprisingly, to read closely: to listen hard to a text, and then to try to get a reader to understand something about it that is not obvious by walking them carefully through the text.

Close reading is the basis of all literary criticism, and most other forms of textual analysis. Every other kind of paper one can write about a text is going to incorporate close reading. More complex papers, however, will incorporate close readings of more than one text: sometimes they will compare two texts to each other, and sometimes they will try to read one text through the ideas in another. When all is said and done, though, most textual analysis really boils down to an organized presentation of one or more close readings.

For the second paper, then, I want you to try to open up your analysis a little bit by trying to deal with more than one text. How you define that is up to you. You can think of yourself as writing a “comparison/contrast” essay; or you can try to use a major idea from one text in order to illuminate something in another one. But in either case, you’re still doing what you were doing in the last paper – close reading. You’re just doing more of it, and more complicatedly.

Below are some ideas that might get you started. Think about them. Change them if you need to. Try something different if you need to. But consider:

• Try a paper in which you compare the Virginian to Oliver Ward in Angle of Repose. What qualities do they have in common? What makes them different? Is what Owen Wister considers good about the Virginian the same thing Stegner thinks is good about Oliver? How about the bad things? Is Oliver a new thing? Is he an evolution? Is he a revolution?

• Write a paper in which you compare Molly Stark Wood to Susan Burling Ward. The questions above apply here, too.

• Write a paper in which you try to explain to somebody outside the class the similarities and differences between the West as we get it in The Virginian and the West as we get it in Angle of Repose. Is Stegner’s book still a western? Is it a revision of the western? Is it a complete revision?
• Write a paper in which you try to explain to somebody outside the class the relationship between East and West in *Angle of Repose*. Or in *The Virginian*. Or, if you want the paper to be longer and are thinking of it as a research paper, in both.

• Write a letter from Wallace Stegner to Owen Wister telling him what you think about his book. Then write a letter from Owen Wister to Wallace Stegner in response. In each letter, try to *embody* each writer – to see the world and the other writer’s book from his point of view. And try to catch the style.

• Write a letter from Leslie Marmon Silko to Owen Wister telling him what you think about his book. Then write a letter from Owen Wister to Silko in response. In each letter, try to *embody* the writer – to see the world and the other writer’s book from his point of view. And try to catch the style.

• Write a paper in which you try to show an outside reader how to *read Ceremony*, using “Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination” as a template.

• Write a paper in which you compare the west as you find it in *Ceremony* with the west as it is presented by either Wister, Stegner or Turner. Don’t try to do all three.


• Write a paper in which you use *Ceremony* to critique the assumptions of the Turner thesis. What does Turner *not* understand about the West that Silko does? In what ways might Silko *agree* with Turner?

OK, that’ll do for now. Remember, if you use one of my assignment prompts, that the prompt is meant to disappear – it’s a starting point, but once the paper becomes yours you should follow where it leads. Remember also that you may use secondary materials here – and in most cases it would help to do so. Quote them if it’s helpful to do so, paraphrase them if it helps you to make a point. If you use somebody else’s idea, supply a footnote so we can find it ourselves if we need to. But remember, above all, that the paper is *yours*, regardless of how much research you do. Don’t let anybody else take it away from you.

Finally, if you decide to write about something other than the prompts above, please let me know as soon as you can what it will be. If I can help you with it, I will.