

**San José State University**  
**Department of English**  
**English 117A, Film and Literature (GE Area S), Spring 2014**

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<b>Class Days/Time:</b>	Tues. 12-2:45
<b>Classroom:</b>	BBC 222

### **Course Description**

**English 117A: Borderlands in American film and literature.** Broadly, the purpose of this course is to consider the connections and contrasts between visual and written forms of creativity. More specifically, this section will consider the notion of American borders, both physical and symbolic—the US/Mexican border and the US/Canadian border. Borders are, of course, physical boundaries as well liminal zones—spaces of conflict and creativity. Borders are porous and invite exchange, crossing back and forth, mixing and blending. A border is often a contested area. Critic Gloria Anzaldua has described the Mexican/American border as an open wound while novelist Carlos Fuentes depicted it as a scar and T.C. Boyle as a “tortilla curtain.” In this course, we will first examine these tropes of the Mexican/American border and then consider the American/Canadian border. At the end of the course we will discuss frontier borders, the psychological boundaries between civilized and uncivilized that shaped the national dialogue.

### **Student Learning Objectives [SLO]**

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature,

creative writing, and/or rhetoric;

2. show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American and World Literature;
3. write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;
4. develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;
5. articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend 4-5 hours per week preparing for a 3-unit course.

### **Required Texts/Readings/Films**

#### **Films (all shown in class):**

*Touch of Evil*

*Lone Star*

*All the Pretty Horses* (clips)

*El Norte*

*Farmingville*

*Frozen River*

*Bledi: mon pays est ici* (This is Our Home)

#### **Books:**

*All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy

*The Crystal Frontier*, Carlos Fuentes

*Tortilla Curtain*, T.C. Boyle

Course PDFs (sent by email)

### **Classroom Protocol**

Students are expected to attend each class, to read assigned texts carefully, and to watch films with analytical sensibilities. Active class participation is encouraged, and quizzes on the readings and films will be given. There are no make up quizzes and if you arrive late to class, you may not be able to take the quiz for that day.

Students are expected to watch the entire film on viewing days—some days there will be brief writing responses after the film. Students may not use cell phones or computers in class.

### **Dropping and Adding**

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drop, grade forgiveness, etc. Refer to the current semester's [Catalog Policies](http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/policies.html) section at <http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/policies.html>. Add/drop deadlines can be found on the [current academic calendar](http://www.sjsu.edu/academic_programs/calendars/academic_calendar/) web page located at [http://www.sjsu.edu/academic\\_programs/calendars/academic\\_calendar/](http://www.sjsu.edu/academic_programs/calendars/academic_calendar/). The [Late Drop Policy](http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/policies/latedrops/policy/) is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/policies/latedrops/policy/>. Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for dropping classes.

Information about the latest changes and news is available at the [Advising Hub](http://www.sjsu.edu/advising/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/advising/>.

### **Assignments and Grading Policy**

#### **A. In-class reading Quizzes: 10%**

#### **B. Film responses: 25%**

**Responses to films:** Each student will write 8 film responses over the course of the semester, each 350-500 words (1 ½-2 typed pages, double spaced). The due dates are indicated on the syllabus and will be collected at the beginning of class (no electronic submissions and no late essays accepted). These are personal responses—*please do not consult secondary or online sources*. What I am interested in is your thoughtful response to a film, your insights about a specific issue. You might write about film techniques. About one actor. Or about the setting at a particular point in the film. About character. You might write about a scene that you found significant, or a theme in the film. You might write something about the structure of the film.

**What is most important in these responses is that you are focused, that you use specific examples, and that you avoid plot summary (we've all seen the same films—so there is no need to go over the plot).** Feel free to use first person—I. The ideas are yours and may be very personal. Please write focused

responses, not broad generalizations about the entire film. Remember not to tell but to demonstrate, elucidate, draw parallels, inform.

**C. One comparative essay, film/readings: 25%**

1000-1200 words (4-5 pp). This essay will consider themes or methods central to a film and a text covered in this class. You might discuss significant similarities/differences/or both. Essay due by April 29.

**D. Midterm exam: 15%.** 10 identification; 5 short answer.

**E. Final exam on May 20, 9:45-12: 25%.** 10 identification, 5 short answer; one essay (which may incorporate extra credit work).

**F. Extra.**

Watch up to three films from the list below for extra credit. In 250-350 words, discuss the ways in which this film ties in with ideas about borders discussed in class. Focus your discussion on a significant character, scene, or image.

*Treasure of the Sierra Madre*

*The Border*

*The Three Burials of [Melquiades Estrada](#).*

*Maria Full of Grace*

*Gringo in Mañanaland*

*Real Women Have Curves*

*Border Incident*

*McCabe and Mrs. Miller*

**Grading written work**

Every reading response and each paper should demonstrate active engagement in the films and in films + text. These assignments will be graded on a 1-10 scale, based on the following:

**9-10: A superior piece of writing.** The response is clearly focused on a passage, the language is sharp, and the writing is free of grammatical errors (please proofread for its/it's; for use of semicolons; for spelling errors; for incomplete sentences...). The response has originality and shows why the passage is important to the larger text (analytical) or important to you (personal).

**7-8: A good piece of writing, solid and clear.** This response may lack the innovation and sharpness of the top category. The point is clear but could be supported with additional details. There may be minor spelling, typographic, and/or grammatical errors. But it is interesting enough to hold a reader's attention.

**5-6: This is an average response, acceptable senior-level work.** It meets the requirements of the assignment, but it does not go beyond. The point may be too broad or unsupported. Examples may be general rather than specific. There may be grammatical errors. The central idea may not be fresh. The writing may be wordy or vague.

**3-4: These responses are short, general, and lacking in examples.** There may be serious grammatical errors.

**1-2: Unacceptable work.** Lacks insight and clarity.

## **SCHEDULE:**

January 28: Introduction to film studies/borders.

February 4: PDF: Torrans, "Borderland"; Dunn "Introduction"; Anzaldua. **FILM:** *Touch of Evil* (1 hr, 51 minutes).

February 11: Discussion of *Touch of Evil*; McCarthy, Section I. **Film response #1** (*Touch of Evil*)

February 18: McCarthy, Section II and III. Clips from *All the Pretty Horses*

February 25: McCarthy IV. **FILM:** *Lone Star*. **Film response #2 (film clips/book)**

March 4: Discussion of *Lone Star*. Fuentes, stories 1 and 2. PDF: Weisman, "The Deadly Harvest of the Sierra Madre" "Two Songs about Drug Smuggling" **Film response #3 (film/book)**

March 11: **FILM:** *Traffic*; Fuentes stories 3 and 4. PDF: "The New World Border"

March 18: Discuss *Traffic*; Fuentes, complete. **MIDTERM: 45 minutes. Film response #4 (Traffic)**

## **March 25: Spring break.**

April 1: **FILM:** *El Norte*. Boyle, *Tortilla Curtain*, Chapter 1.

April 8: Discussion of *El Norte*; **Film response #5. (*El Norte*)** Boyle, *Tortilla Curtain*

April 15: **FILM:** *Farmingville* (documentary, 78 minutes); *Tortilla Curtain*, complete. Reader, Cisneros, “Woman Hollering Creek”

April 22: **Canadian/American border:** PDF: Slave narratives: Josiah Henson, Benjamin Drew; Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley* excerpt; O’Brien, “On the Rainy River” **Film response #6 (*Farmingville*)**

April 29: **FILM:** *Frozen River*; PDF, Thomas King, “Borders” **Essay due by this date or before.**

May 6: Discuss *Frozen River*; **FILM:** *Bledi: mon pays est ici* (This is Our Home) **See:** [www.solidarityacrossborders.org](http://www.solidarityacrossborders.org) . **Film response #7 (*Frozen River*)**

May 13: Excerpt, *Imaginary Line: Life on an unfinished Border*; **Film response #8. (*Bledi*)**

## **University Policies**

### **Academic integrity**

Your commitment as a student to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University. The [University’s Academic Integrity policy](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/S07-2.htm), located at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/S07-2.htm>, requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The [Student Conduct and Ethical Development website](http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/) is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>.

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person’s ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you

would like to include your assignment or any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy S07-2 requires approval of instructors.

### **Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the [Disability Resource Center](http://www.drc.sjsu.edu/) (DRC) at <http://www.drc.sjsu.edu/> to establish a record of their disability.