

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE



LITERATURE  
OF THE  
AMERICAN  
WEST

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*Edited by Steven Frye*

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EDITED BY  
STEVEN FRYE

*California State University, Bakersfield*



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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
THE LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAN WEST

This *Companion* provides a comprehensive introduction to one of the most vibrant and expansive traditions in world literature. The American West occupies a unique place in the global imagination, and the literature it produced transcends the category of "region" in theme and form. Written by prominent international scholars, the essays cover a diverse group of key texts and authors, including major figures in the Native American, Hispanic, Asian American, and African American movements. Treatments range from environmental and eco-poetic to transnational and transcultural, reflecting the richness of the field. This volume places the literature in deep historical context and features a chronology and bibliography for further reading. It will be an essential guide for students of literature of the American West and of American literature generally.

STEVEN FRYE is a professor of English at California State University, Bakersfield. He is president of the Cormac McCarthy Society, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, and author of *Understanding Cormac McCarthy* and *Understanding Larry McMurtry*.

*A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.*

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
THE LITERATURE OF THE  
AMERICAN WEST

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STEVEN FRYE is a professor of English at California State University, Bakersfield and president of the Cormac McCarthy Society. He is the author of *Historiography and Narrative Design in the American Romance: A Study of Four Authors, Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, and *Understanding Larry McMurtry*. He is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, *Critical Insights: The Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe*, and *Critical Insights: The Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*. He is also the author of numerous articles on Cormac McCarthy, Herman Melville, and other writers in the American Romance tradition.

ERIC GARDNER is a professor of English at Saginaw Valley State University. His *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* won the Research Society for American Periodicals Book Award and was a *Choice* "Outstanding Academic Title" in 2010. His second monograph, *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture*, was drafted with the support of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities and explores the early years of the African Methodist Episcopal Church's weekly newspaper. Gardner has also edited three volumes, and his shorter work has appeared in venues ranging from *American Literary History* to *PMLA*.

## CONTRIBUTORS

M. CARMEN GOMEZ-GALISTEO holds a BA in English with honors and a PhD (sobresaliente cum laude) in American studies, both from the Universidad de Alcalá (Madrid, Spain). She is the author of *The Wind Is Never Gone: Sequels, Parodies and Rewritings of Gone With the Wind* and *Early Visions and Representations of America: Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Naufragios and William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation*. She currently teaches at UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) in Madrid.

CATHRYN HALVERSON is an associate professor of American literature at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark and the author of *Maverick Autobiographies: Women Writers and the American West* and *Playing House in the American West: Western Women's Life Narratives*. Her present book project is a study of the *Atlantic Monthly* and Western women's life writing.

SUSAN KOLLIN is a professor of English at Montana State University, where she teaches courses on Western fiction and film, transnational American literature, and environmental humanities. She is the author of *Captivating Westerns: The Middle East in the American West*, and the editor of *A History of Western American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). She is also a former Fulbright Scholar at the American University in Cairo.

PIERRE LAGAYETTE is Emeritus Professor of American Studies at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, where he taught graduate seminars on the American West and contemporary American history and literature. He is also the founder and director of the Center for Western America and Asia-Pacific Studies at Paris-Sorbonne and has been a visiting scholar at Stanford University. He is the author of *The American West: Reality and Myths*, *Strategies of Difference in Modern Poetry: Case Studies in Poetic Composition*, *Major Landmarks in American History*, *A Short History of American Literature*, *Contemporary United States*, *A Bilingual Guide*, and *Executive Empire: The American Presidency from F.D. Roosevelt to G.W. Bush*. He has also been a contributor to the *Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, edited by Steven Frye.

LEE CLARK MITCHELL is Holmes Professor of Belles-Lettres at Princeton University. His recent essays have focused on Cormac McCarthy, the Coen brothers, Henry James, and noir fiction. His books include *Witnesses to a Vanishing America: The Nineteenth-Century Response*, *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism*, *The Photograph and the American Indian*, and *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*. Currently, he is completing a book on close reading in modernist American novels.

NICHOLAS MONK is an associate professor at the University of Warwick, specializing in twentieth-century American fiction, and director of the University's Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning. His monograph on Cormac McCarthy will

be published in 2016. He is also the editor of *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy*, to which he contributed the introduction and an essay titled "Versions of the *Seeleroman*: Cormac McCarthy and Leslie Silko." He teaches the MA module, "Literatures of the American Southwest," as well as modules on identity, drama, and performance. A coauthored piece "Letting the Dead Come Out to Dance: An Embodied and Spatial Approach to Teaching Early Modern Drama" appears in *Performing Early Modern Drama Today*, from Cambridge University Press. His other principal research interest is interdisciplinary and collaborative pedagogy – he is the lead author of *Open-Space Learning: A Transdisciplinary Pedagogy*.

MARGUERITE NGUYEN is an assistant professor of English at Wesleyan University, where she teaches and researches American and Asian American literature. Her publications have appeared in *Minnesota Review* and *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South*, and a coedited special issue of *MELUS* titled "Refugee Culture: Forty Years after the Vietnam War" is forthcoming. Her current book project, *Games with Time: Vietnam, U.S. Empire, and American Literature*, examines Vietnamese-American literary connections from the nineteenth century onward to understand how U.S. empire has depended on managing competing notions of time. A second project is under way on Asian American racialization in New Orleans culture, with an emphasis on the relationship between literary form, local discourses of race, and Pacific routes of migration.

LINDA RADER OVERMAN is an adjunct professor of English at California State University, Northridge. She holds a PhD in creative writing from Lancaster University (United Kingdom) and a master of fine arts in creative writing from California State University, Chico. Her debut novel, *Letters Between Us*, was selected as a finalist in the 2008 National Best Books Awards, in the category of Fiction & Lit: Chick Lit/Women's Lit. Her work has appeared in many anthologies.

STACEY PEEBLES is director of film studies and an associate professor of English at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. She is the author of *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq* and the editor of *Violence in Literature* as well as a forthcoming book on Cormac McCarthy and performance. She is the editor of *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* and the author of a number of articles on McCarthy's work and the representation of war in literature and film.

RAFAEL PÉREZ-TORRES is a professor of English at University of California, Los Angeles. He has published numerous articles on Chicano/a literature and culture, postmodernism, multiculturalism, and contemporary American literature in *Cultural Critique*, *American Literary History*, *Genre*, *Aztlán*, and *American Literature*, as well as in numerous edited collections. He served as co-curator for the art exhibit "Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California," and he sits on several editorial boards. He is the author of three books: *Mestizaje: Critical*



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*Uses of Race in Chicano Culture; To Alcatraz, Death Row, and Back: Memories of an East L.A. Outlaw* written with Ernest B. López; and *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*. His current work addresses the role of modernity and modernization in the shaping of Chicano culture.

ROBERT THACKER is Charles A. Dana Professor of Canadian Studies and English at St. Lawrence University. Among his publications are *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* and *Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives*; four coedited critical volumes, two on comparing the Canada-U.S. Wests and two on Willa Cather. He is now at work on another volume of *Cather Studies* and a collection of essays on Munro by various hands. Forthcoming in 2016 is Thacker's *Reading Alice Munro, 1973–2013*, a selection of his essays on the 2013 Nobel Laureate.

GIOIA WOODS is an associate professor of humanities and President's Distinguished Teaching Fellow in Northern Arizona University's Department of Comparative Cultural Studies. She is the author of the Western Writer's Series monograph *Gary Paul Nabhan* and the coeditor of *Western Subjects: Autobiographical Writing in the North American West*. She was president of the Western Literature Association in 2010 and continues research and publishing in Western American literature and culture, and ecological criticism. Her current project is a cultural biography of City Lights Bookstore and Press.

DANIEL WORDEN is an associate professor of English at the University of New Mexico. He is the author of *Masculine Style: The American West and Literary Modernism*, which received the Thomas J. Lyon Book Award in Western American Literary and Cultural Studies. He is also the coeditor of *Oil Culture* and the editor of *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World*.

## CHRONOLOGY

- AD 500      Anasazi (ancestral Pueblo) culture widespread in Four Corners area. Approximately five hundred specialized small tribes are living in California.
- 500-1400      Hohokam culture brings large areas in southern Arizona under irrigation.
- 950+      Mesa Verde cliff dwellings constructed.
- 950-1300      Chaco culture emerges in New Mexico; includes 125 planned towns.
- 1000      Pueblo and Hopi villages active in their present locations.
- ca. 1150      Oraibi (Arizona) established.
- 1220-1400      Navahos arrive in the Southwest from the north.
- 1276-1299      Severe drought in the Southwest.
- 1528      Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca shipwrecked on Gulf Coast; begins eight-year journey to Mexico.
- 1540      Francisco Vázquez de Coronado begins an exploration from Arizona; over the next two years, travels as far northeast as Kansas. One of his officers, Don Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, takes a trip with twelve other men and sees the Grand Canyon. They are the first Europeans to do so.
- 1598      Juan de Oñate colonizes northern Mexico.
- 1609-1610      Santa Fe founded; "Palace of the Governors" built.
- 1680      Pueblo Indians revolt and drive the Spanish from New Mexico.

# CHRONOLOGY

- 1692 Don Diego de Vargas reconquers New Mexico.
- 1769 Father Junípero Serra founds mission at San Diego; in the next thirteen years, he establishes nine of the twenty-one Franciscan missions in California.
- 1774-1776 Juan Batista de Anza leads colonizing parties from Mexico to the San Francisco Bay area.
- 1776 Fathers Dominguez and Escalante travel much of Colorado and Utah.
- 1783 Treaty of Paris concludes Revolutionary War, sets United States at Mississippi River.
- 1803 Thomas Jefferson buys Louisiana Territory from France, doubling the size of the United States.
- 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark cross the Louisiana Territory and go on to the mouth of the Columbia River; they return with information about the West. Their *Journals* become an American classic.
- 1805-1807 Zebulon Pike explores Colorado and New Mexico.
- 1810-1812 J. J. Astor sends a party overland to the Pacific to gain control of the Western fur market. The expedition fails in its main purpose. Returning, "Astorian" Robert Stuart crosses through South Pass in Wyoming, documented in *On the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Journey of Discovery*.
- 1819 Naturalist Thomas Nuttall makes a solo journey up the Arkansas River drainage onto the plains; describes the trip in *A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory, During the Year 1819*.
- 1821 Mexico gains independence; assumes control of the Southwest.
- 1824 Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger, and other trappers cross South Pass, enter Great Basin, and discover the Great Salt Lake. Mountain-man era begins.
- 1826-1827 Jedediah Smith accomplishes immense explorations through Great Basin, California, and Oregon. Records these trips in his journal, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California, 1826-1827*.

# CHRONOLOGY

- 1832 Washington Irving tours a portion of Oklahoma; describes journey in *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835). Capt. Benjamin Bonneville, on leave from the U.S. Army, begins three years' stay in the West as a mountain man; keeps a detailed journal used by Washington Irving for *The Adventures of Capt. Bonneville U.S.A* (1837). Painter George Catlin tours the West. In *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (1841), suggests a huge "nation's park," covering much of the High Plains, in which Indians and wildlife would be left undisturbed.
- 1834 Mountain man Joe Walker leads a group across Great Basin to California; he sees Yosemite Valley, the first Euro-American to do so.
- 1835 Washington Irving meets J. J. Astor; working from Astor's documents, writes *Astoria* (1836).
- 1836 Washington Irving meets Capt. Benjamin Bonneville, buys his journal, and writes *The Adventures of Capt. Bonneville U.S.A.* (1837), the first account of the Western fur trade.
- 1839 John K. Townsend, *Narrative of a Journey across the Rocky Mountains, to the Columbia River, and a Visit to the Sandwich Islands, Chili, & c.*
- 1841 Last mountain-man rendezvous.
- 1842-1844 John Charles Fremont surveys the West for the government; writes *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* (1845).
- 1845 Journalist John L. O'Sullivan coins the phrase "Manifest Destiny."
- 1846 Francis Parkman takes post-college tour into eastern Wyoming; writes *The Oregon Trail* (1849).  
Thousands of immigrants travel the Oregon and California Trails; Donner Party becomes trapped by Sierra Nevada snows.
- 1846-1848 Mexican-American War. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transfers control of the Southwest to the United States.

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- 1847            Mormons cross from Nebraska to Salt Lake City.
- 1848-1849     Discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill on the American River  
inspires fortune hunters and others to enter California.
- 1850            California becomes a state.
- 1852            Approximately one hundred thousand prospectors and  
miners are at work in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada.
- 1853            Gadsden Purchase sets border with Mexico along its present  
lines.
- 1854            John Rollin Ridge, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin  
Murietta, the Celebrated California Bandit*, the first novel  
published by a Native American (Cherokee).
- 1857            Mountain Meadows Massacre in southwest Utah;  
Mormon settlers, with Piute accomplices, kill somewhere  
between 90 and 115 members of a wagon train bound for  
California.
- 1858-1860     Gold rushes in Nevada, Colorado, and Idaho add to the  
Western population. San Francisco becomes the West's first  
literary center.
- 1860            House of Beadle and Adams, New York, begins publication  
of popular fiction with frontier and Western themes.
- 1861            Telegraph connects Eastern and Western United States
- 1862            Homestead Act precipitates Western settlement.
- 1864            The "Colorado Volunteers" destroy a village of Cheyenne  
Indians at Sand Creek.  
  
President Lincoln sets aside Yosemite Valley as a protected  
reserve.  
  
Majority of Navaho tribe is captured in Arizona and taken  
to New Mexico, where they are held until 1868.
- 1867            Appointment of General Philip Sheridan as commander  
of the Department of the Missouri signals increased  
militarization of U.S. policy toward Western Indians.
- 1868            Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer leads the 7th Cavalry  
in massacre of a Cheyenne village on the Washita River in  
Oklahoma.

- The *Overland Monthly* begins publication in San Francisco, under editorship of Bret Harte.
- 1869 "Golden Spike" driven at Promontory, Utah, completing the transcontinental railroad.  
John Muir's first summer in the Sierra Nevada.  
John Wesley Powell and party descend the Green and Colorado Rivers, make the last "discoveries" of a mountain range (the Henry Mountains) and river (the Escalante) in the continental United States.
- 1872 Clarence King, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*.  
Mark Twain, *Roughing It*.  
Yellowstone National Park created; world's first reserve of its kind.
- 1874 Barbed wire patented; "open range" days numbered.  
George A. Custer, *My Life on the Plains*.  
John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Tributaries*.
- 1876 George A. Custer leads 7th Cavalry into disaster near Little Bighorn River, Montana.
- 1881 Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, exposé of Indian policy.
- 1882 Clarence Dutton, *Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District*.
- 1883 Sarah Winnemucca (Northern Piute), *Life among the Piutes*.
- 1884 Last significant shipment of buffalo hides from the Plains.
- 1887 Five hundred forty-one buffalo remain alive in the United States; of these, an estimated eighty-five are living in the wild.
- 1890 Ghost Dance takes place, followed by the massacre of Indian village at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, conducted by the 7th Cavalry; 102 Lakota men, 44 women, and 18 children are killed.  
Yosemite National Park is created, as suggested by John Muir.  
U.S. Census Bureau declares frontier closed.

## CHRONOLOGY

- Mormon leader Wilford Woodruff issues manifesto against polygamy; in succeeding decades, Mormon society becomes increasingly "mainstream."
- 1891 Hamlin Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*.  
President Harrison creates Forest Reserves.
- 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner promulgates "frontier thesis."
- 1894 John Muir, *The Mountains of California*.
- 1897 Klondike Gold Rush
- 1899 Frank Norris, *McTeague*.
- 1900 First motor vehicle reaches south rim of the Grand Canyon.
- 1902 Owen Wister, *The Virginian*.  
Newlands Act establishes Bureau of Reclamation, inaugurating era of large, federally sponsored water projects that will affect much of the West.
- 1903 Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*.  
Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*.
- 1904-1907 Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, a thirty-two-volume set of narratives by explorers and early travelers.
- 1905 Los Angeles voters approve bonds for an aqueduct that will supply the city by taking the Owens River, 250 miles north.
- 1906 Much of San Francisco destroyed by earthquake and fire.
- 1911 Enos Mills, *The Spell of the Rockies*.
- 1912 Zane Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage*  
John Muir, *The Yosemite*.
- 1913 Congress authorizes reservoir in Hetch Hetchy, within Yosemite National Park.  
Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*
- 1915 Rocky Mountain National Park established.  
Taos Society of Artists founded.
- 1916 National Park Service created.

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- Jeanette Rankin of Montana becomes the first woman elected to Congress.
- Federal Aid Highway Act authorizes government road subsidies; federal highway building will have a major effect on the West.
- 1918 Willa Cather, *My Antonia*.
- 1920 Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*.
- 1922 Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (Pulitzer Prize, 1923).  
Colorado River Compact apportions that stream's flow among Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and California; clarifies federal government's role in Western natural resource development.
- 1923-1924 Teapot Dome oil scandal.
- 1924 Mary Austin, *The Land of Journeys' Ending*.
- 1925 Willa Cather, *The Professor's House*.  
Dorothy Scarborough, *The Wind*.  
Robinson Jeffers, *Rian Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems*.
- 1927 Ole Rølvaag, *Giants in the Earth*.  
Mourning Dove [Okanogan], *Co-ge-we-a*, the first novel by an Indian woman.  
Harvey Fergusson, *Wolf Song*.
- 1929 Oliver LaFarge, *Laughing Boy*.
- 1930s Depression era enlarges federal presence in the West. In per capita assistance received through the New Deal, fourteen Western states lead the nation. Farm support and work relief programs contribute significantly to Western sustenance.
- 1931 Vardis Fisher, *Dark Bridwell*.
- 1932 Mary Austin, *Earth Horizon*.  
Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*.  
Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*.  
Vardis Fisher, *In Tragic Life*.
- 1933 *The Lone Ranger* debuts on station WXYZ, Detroit.



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- 1934 Thomas Hornsby Ferril, *Westering*.  
Taylor Grazing Act sets aside public domain for federal management, not for sale to the public.
- 1935 H. L. Davis, *Honey in the Horn*.  
Frank Waters, *The Wild Earth's Nobility*.
- 1936 D'Arcy McNickle [Cree/Irish], *The Surrounded*.  
Boulder Dam completed, largest federal project to date.
- 1937 John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*.
- 1939 John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*.  
Vardis Fisher, *Children of God*.  
Franklin Walker, *San Francisco Literary Frontier*.  
Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust*.
- 1940 Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Ox-Bow Incident*.
- 1941 Entrance of United States into World War II. By 1943, the federal government has become the largest single employer in the West.  
Maurine Whipple, *The Giant Joshua*.
- 1942 One hundred ten thousand Americans of Japanese descent are removed from the West Coast and placed in camps.  
Frank Waters, *The Man Who Killed the Deer*.
- 1943 Wallace Stegner, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*.
- 1943-1945 Atomic bombs are developed in a secret project at Los Alamos, New Mexico.
- 1944 Adolph Murie, *The Wolves of Mount McKinley*.
- 1945 Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The City of Trembling Leaves*.
- 1947 A. B. Guthrie Jr., *The Big Sky*.  
Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*.
- 1949 Jack Schaefer, *Shane*.  
A. B. Guthrie Jr., *The Way West*.  
Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Track of the Cat*.
- 1950s Military presence in the West and defense industries leads to increasing dependence of the area on Cold War spending.