

Editor's Corner

I've been teaching at Emporia State University since 1970, and in order to keep ennui at bay (both for me and for the students) I like to offer a new class or try a different approach to an old one on a more or less regular basis. This proclivity manifested itself in the fall of 2006 in a class called The Frontier Experience in Global Literature, the premise of which was that certain figures in the grassland frontiers of various New World cultures had attained iconic status in their particular nations.

To explore this premise, the eleven students in the class (a mix of upperclassmen and graduate students) read selected fiction (four novels and a collection of short stories) from five countries: the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, and Canada. Each country was represented, respectively, by the following books: Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, Mariano Azuela's *Los de Abajo (The Underdogs)*, Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, Joseph Furphy's *Such Is Life*, and *Best Mounted Police Stories*, edited by Dick Harrison. The iconic figures selected were the cowboy, the revolutionary, the gaucho, the swagman, and the Mountie.

I first divided the class into four teams and assigned each team the responsibility for researching and presenting historical and cultural background on a particular culture and for leading class discussions on the book derived from that culture. To set a pattern of expectation, I began the semester by leading a discussion of the cowboy, the American West, and *The Virginian*. Then the students took over. The results of this experimental class form the content of this issue of *Heritage of the Great Plains*, a comparative study of grassland icons.