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## Review of Elmer Kelton and West Texas: A Literary Relationship.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Elmer Kelton and West Texas: A Literary Relationship.* By Judy Alter. Texas Writer's Series, No. 1. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1988. Conclusion, bibliography, index. 161 pp. \$19.95.

The University of North Texas Press has launched a new series of critical/biographical studies of Texas writers and has started, appropriately, with one of the best novelists writing today—in Texas or elsewhere. Elmer Kelton has published twenty-seven novels interpreting the development of Texas from the beginning of settlement by Anglos to the present.

Author of the volume is Judy Alter, a novelist and director of the Texas Christian University Press in Fort Worth. Alter's evaluation of Kelton is more than favorable. She calls him "a genuine, unaffected, kind and gentle man, the sort, who, in person, makes you want to hunker down and listen to his stories, his voice, and his wisdom" (p. 4). And there is much to listen to, especially from one usually classed as a Western writer.

Alter briefly surveys the "popular" novels, the early pulp stories, and Kelton's journalistic output for more than forty years, but a major part of her concern is with the six serious novels: *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, *The Time It Never Rained*, *The Good Old Boys*, *The Wolf and the Buffalo*, *Stand Proud*, and *The Man Who Rode Midnight*. These novels incorporate historical background into perceptive studies of characters, mostly men, who are forced to cope with change as progressive stages of the frontier force themselves on the people. They are all powerful works, and *The Time It Never Rained* is one of

the best American novels of this century in any sub-genre of the form.

Alter's style is straightforward and concise. Her research appears complete and well balanced, and her interpretations are traditional, not symbolic, deconstructive gibberish. She has synthesized the fairly extensive available commentary and added to it. This is a promising volume in a series valuable to readers as well as to scholars of Texas and Southwestern letters.

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