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The Letters of Dolly and Zane Grey

Dolly Grey, Zane Grey

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

The Letters of Dolly and Zane Grey Introduction JUDGED BY THE MEASURES of commercial success, productivity, and the sheer grandeur and melodrama of his life, Zane Grey wins the prize among American authors. In a career that spanned the first four decades of this century, he wrote what would eventually be—after they were all published—an astounding eighty-nine books, with over 130 million copies sold worldwide. Following his death in 1939, Harper's continued to publish one Zane Grey book annually until 1964. Because there was generally more money to be made in periodicals, many of his stories were originally published as several-part serials in popular magazines, for which he was paid pharaonic sums—\$40,000 to \$80,000, amounting to \$800,000 to \$1,600,000 in today's dollars. His serials were then put out as books by Harper and Brothers, later reprinted in cheaper editions, and finally syndicated to smaller newspapers and magazines. From 1915 to 1925, Zane Grey was near the top of the best-seller list virtually without interruption. Many of his books became fodder for the budding movie industry, as well. In 1919 Grey himself attempted to go into film production but grew dissatisfied with his partner and sold out to Jesse

Lasky, who renamed his company Paramount Productions. Paramount made an average of two Grey movies a year throughout the rest of the silent era. Many of his stories would be rendered into film two to four times, although in a lot of cases the movies had little more of Zane Grey in them than a title, his name, and possibly a location. Actors who made debut or early appearances in Grey westerns included Randolph Scott, Shirley Temple, Gary Cooper, Wallace Beery, William Powell, Jack LaRue, Fay Wray and Buster Crabb. Why was Grey so popular? Many of his characters are wooden and sentimentalized. All too easily they walk off the pages of his books and put on the white and black hats of early Western movies. Most of his plots are so packed with melodramatic incident that they defy summary. At times, his characters seem incapable of any motive besides jealousy or revenge. One of his overriding themes was survival of the fittest in a violent and dangerous world—the Social Darwinism that had trickled down from the avant-garde writers of the late nineteenth century to popular literature. Yet despite its flaws and quaintness, his writing continues to survive and find new readers even in the nineties. For someone who racked up such an impressive final tally, Grey was a late starter. He began his working life not as a writer but a dentist. For several years he wrote fishing articles, juvenile fiction, and historical fiction set during Colonial times. On the basis of having sold a novel, he abandoned his dental practice and went for broke as a writer, but over a year later, at age thirty-five, the likelihood of his making a living at it looked increasingly dim. He considered reopening his dental office, but then took up the project of writing a Western as a result of going to a lecture and later visiting the Arizona ranch of a former buffalo hunter named J. C. Jones—a journey funded by the last of his wife's inheritance. Westerns had of course existed before Grey wrote them, including the dime novels of the 1880s and '90s, and he had the example of at least one early masterpiece, Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. The result of his trip to Arizona, *The Last of the Plainsmen*, was initially rejected by a dozen publishers, but it and Grey's subsequent novels of the West arrived at a time when Americans were both appreciating the role of the frontier in American history and lamenting its passing. Frederick Jackson Turner's influential *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1894) downplayed the impact of Britain and the East in favor of the frontier as the principal influence on America's institutions and character. Turner's partly sentimentalized image of the West was shared by many. The wilderness and wide open spaces, a constant in American art...

The Letters of Dolly and Zane Grey

Introduction

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His serials were then put out as books by Harper and Brothers, later reprinted in cheaper editions, and finally syndicated to smaller newspapers and magazines. From 1915 to 1925, Zane Grey was near the top of the best-seller list virtually without interruption. Many of his books became fodder for the budding movie industry, as well. In 1919 Grey himself attempted to go into film production but grew dissatisfied with his partner and sold out to Jesse Lasky, who renamed his company Paramount Productions. Paramount made an average of two Grey movies a year throughout the rest of the silent era. Many of his stories would be rendered into film two to four times, although in a lot of cases the movies had little more of Zane Grey in them than a title, his name, and possibly a location. Actors who made debut or early appearances in Grey westerns included Randolph Scott, Shirley Temple, Gary Cooper, Wallace Beery, William Powell, Jack LaRue, Fay Wray and Buster Crabb.

Why was Grey so popular? Many of his characters are wimpy and sentimentalized. All too easily they walk off the pages of his books and put on the white and black hats of early Western movies. Most of his plots are so packed with melodramatic incident that they defy summary. At times, his characters seem incapable of any motive besides jealousy or revenge. One of his overriding themes was survival of the fittest in a violent and dangerous world—the Social Darwinism that had trickled down from the avant-garde writers of the late nineteenth century to popular literature. Yet despite its flaws and quaintness, his writing continues to survive and find new readers even in the nineties.

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