



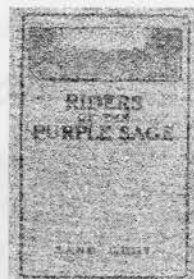
THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

Zane Grey - Father of the Western Genre January 31, 1872 – October 23, 1939



Zane Grey

Pearl Zane Grey was an American dentist and author best known for his popular adventure novels and stories associated with the Western genre in literature and the arts; he idealized the American frontier. *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) was his best-selling book and one of the most successful Western novels of the times. Grey's publishers, Harper's paired his novels with some of the best illustrators of the time, including N.C. Wyeth, Frank Schoonover, Douglas Duer, W.H.D. Koerner and Charles Russell.



Grey's success brought out harsh attacks by critics who thought his depictions of the West were too fanciful, too violent, and not faithful to the moral realities of the frontier. They thought his characters unrealistic and much larger-than-life. One of the most vocal, Heywood Brown stated that "the substance of any two Zane Grey books could be written upon the back of a postage stamp." T. K. Whipple praised a typical Grey novel as a modern version of the ancient Beowulf saga, a battle of passions with one another and with the will, a struggle of love and hate, or remorse and revenge, of blood, lust, honor, friendship, anger, grief—all of a grand scale and all incalculable and mysterious." But he also criticized Grey's writing, "His style, for example, has the stiffness which comes from an imperfect mastery of the medium. It lacks fluency and facility.

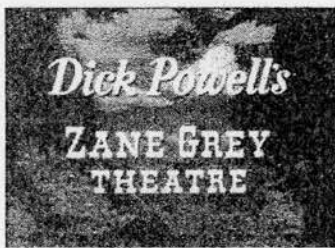
Grey based his work in his own varied first-hand experience, supported by careful note-taking, and considerable research. Despite his great popular success and fortune, Grey read the reviews and sometimes became paralyzed by negative emotions after critical ones.



His novel *The Vanishing American* (1925), first serialized in *The Ladies' Home Journal* in 1922, prompted a heated debate. People recognized its Navajo hero as patterned after Jim Thorpe, a great Native American athlete. Grey portrayed the struggle of the Navajo to preserve their identity and culture against corrupting influences of the white government and of missionaries. This view point enraged religious groups. Grey contended, "I have studied the Navaho Indians for twelve years. I know their wrongs. The

missionaries sent out there are almost everyone mean, vicious, weak, immoral, useless men." To have the book published, Grey agreed to some structural changes. With this book, Grey completed the most productive period of his writing career, having laid out most major themes, character types, and settings.





In addition to the commercial success of his printed works, (Nearly 100 books, 50 of which were Westerns) they had second lives and continuing influence when adapted as films and television productions. His novels and short stories have been adapted into 112 films, two television episodes, and a television series, *Dick Powell's Zane Grey Theater*.

Grey became one of the first millionaire authors. With his veracity and emotional intensity, he connected with millions of readers worldwide, during peacetime and war, and inspired many Western writers who followed him.

Zane Grey was a major force in shaping the myths of the Old West; his books and stories were adapted into other media, such as film and TV productions. He was the author of more than 90 books, some published posthumously and/or based on serials originally published in magazines. His total book sales exceed 40 million.

Hollywood



Grey started his association with Hollywood when William Fox bought the rights to *Riders of the Purple Sage* for \$2,500 in 1916. The ascending arc of Grey's career matched that of the motion picture industry. It eagerly adapted Western stories to the screen practically from its inception, with Bronco Billy Anderson becoming the first major western star. Legendary director John Ford was then a young stage hand and Tom Mix, who had been a real cowhand, was defining the persona of the film cowboy.

After his first two books were adapted to the screen, Grey formed his own motion picture company. This allowed him to control production values and faithfulness to his books. After seven films he sold his company to Jesse Lasky, who was a partner of the founder of Paramount Pictures. Paramount made a number of movies based on Grey's writings and hired him as advisor. Many of his films were shot at locations described in his books.

In 1936 Grey appeared as himself in a feature film shot in Australia, *White Death* (1936). At the same time he provided a story that was filmed as *Rangle River* (1936).

Grey became disenchanted by the commercial exploitation and copyright infringement of his works. He felt his stories and characters were diluted by being adapted to film. Nearly fifty of his novels were converted into over one hundred Western movies. Shortly after Grey's death, the success of Fritz Lang's *Western Union* (1941), a film based on one of his books, helped bring about a resurgence in Hollywood westerns. Its costars were Randolph Scott and Robert Young. The period of the 1940s and 1950s included the great works of John Ford, who successfully used the settings of Grey's novels in Arizona and Utah.

Two of Grey's most successful writings were; *The Lone Star Ranger* with the novel adapted into four movies: 1914, 1919, 1930 and 1942 as well as a comic book in 1949. *King of the Royal Mounted* turned into comic books and multiple *Big Little Books* and later, turned into a 1936 film with three film serials following. These stories inspired two radio series by George Trendle (WXYZ, Detroit) and then also adapted again for television, forming the series *The Lone Ranger* and *Challenge of the Yukon* (*Sgt. Preston of the Yukon* on TV).

More of Grey's work was featured in adapted form on the Zane Grey Show, which ran on the Mutual Broadcasting System for five months in the 1940s, and the "Zane Grey Western Theatre", which had a five-year run of 145 episodes.[79]

Many famous actors got their start in films based on Zane Grey books. They included Gary Cooper, Randolph Scott, William Powell, Wallace Beery, Richard Arlen, Buster Crabbe, Shirley Temple, and Fay Wray. Victor Fleming, later director of *Gone with the Wind*, and Henry Hathaway, who later directed *True Grit*, both learned their craft on Grey films.

Links:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zane_Grey

<https://blog.bookstellyouwhy.com/zane-grey-father-of-the-western-genre>

<http://zgws.org/zgmovies.php> - List of Movies

Zane Grey- Biography by Marian Kester Coombs

Zane Grey's West Society

Zane Grey, the greatest storyteller of the American West, was born in Zanesville, Ohio, on January 31, 1872. His Zane ancestors had been vigorous, illustrious pioneers in America's "First West", the historic Ohio Valley, and his boyhood thrill at their adventures would eventually motivate Grey to novelize both his family's own story and the stories of many another pioneer homesteader, farm wife, rancher, cowhand, naive Eastern belle, camp follower, miner, Indian youth, trail driver, railroad man, desperado, buffalo hunter, soldier, gambler, wanderer and poor wayfaring stranger, as the great migration Westward coursed in waves across the continent.

In his youth Zane Grey was a semiprofessional baseball player and a half-hearted dentist, having studied dentistry to appease his father while on a baseball scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania. But he wanted above all to write, and taught himself to write with much stern discipline so as to free his innate and immense storytelling capacity. Many a lean year came and went as he waited for a publisher to finally recognize a best-seller when it saw one. For Zane Grey became the best-selling Western author of all time, and for most of the teens, 20s, and 30s, had a least one novel in the top ten every year.

His marriage in 1905 to Lina Roth, whom he called Dolly, was a triumph of the old-fashioned "complementary" model of matrimony, wherein the husband ranges freely to sustain the inspiration for his calling, in this case the writing of adventure-romances, and the wife tends the family, edits the manuscripts, and makes deals with the publishers. It is fair to say that Dolly's belief in Zane's calling was the single factor most responsible for the success of his lengthy career. Their first home was a farm house on 3 acres that Zane Grey bought before they were married, but the couple soon moved to a home on land her family owned on the Delaware River in Lackawaxen, Pennsylvania.

Zane and Dolly had three children: Romer, Betty, and Loren. Romer and Betty were born in New York City while Loren was born in Middleton, NY.

The breakthrough success of *Heritage of the Desert* in 1910 enabled Zane Grey to establish a home in Altadena, California, and a hunting lodge on the Mogollon Rim near Payson, Arizona; and the family of five moved West for good. A lifelong passion for angling and the rich rewards of his writing also allowed Grey to roam the world's premier game-fishing grounds in his own schooner and reel in several deep-sea angling records which stood for decades. A prodigiously prolific writer, Grey would spend several months each year gathering experiences and adventures, whether on "safari" in the wilds of Colorado or fishing off Tahiti, and then spend the rest of the year weaving them all into tales for serialization, magazine articles, or the annual novel.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zane_Grey

Zane Grey wrote to live and lived to write -- surely a balance rarely attained -- until his untimely death of heart failure on October 23, 1939. When all the posthumous works were finally published, many years later, he left us almost 90 books in print, of which about 60 are Westerns, 9 concern fishing, and 3 trace the fate of the Ohio Zanes, the rest being short story collections, a biography of the young George Washington, juvenile fiction and baseball stories. Readers of Zane Grey today will feel cast over them the same spell of adventure, character, natural beauty and uniquely American idealism as did his readers half a century ago.

ZGWS member Marian Kester Coombs lives in Maryland, with her husband Fran, who is Managing Editor of The Washington Times, and her two daughters. Marian is a substitute teacher and freelance writer.

<http://www.zgws.org/zgbio.php>