

## ZANE GREY AND IMAGES OF THE AMERICAN WEST\*

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**ABSTRACT.** Novels by Zane Grey crystallized a set of symbols for the American West in the minds of his millions of readers. He infused the frontier myth with vivid imagery of a sublime and beautiful landscape inhabited by heroic cowboys, deadly gunmen, polygamous Mormons, and noble Indians. He also localized the myth in and along the southern margin of the Colorado Plateau, so that this landscape became the quintessential West. By extending his version into the 1930s, Grey encouraged the belief that the Wild West persisted well into the twentieth century. *Key words:* American West, Grey [Zane], literary geography, place imagery.

The western novels by Zane Grey have been a source of imagery about the American West for almost the entire twentieth century. The plots and characterizations of Grey's popular novels set in the American West have been thoroughly examined, but it is less clear how his work acquired a fundamental role in the creation of western imagery. With the ability to influence much of the public, mass media dominate the molding of popular culture. A medium that repeatedly projects a set of simple ideas can define the amorphous perceptual lenses through which people view a landscape and fuse them into a clear, uniformly perceived place image. Movies and television now often clarify place perceptions, but literature traditionally played a key role.

Speculation about the meaning of the American West, a landscape that occupies center stage in American folklore, is more profitable with an understanding of the evolution of the ideas that are attached to the place. This article explains how Grey's distinctive combination of spatial, temporal, landscape, and social elements crystallized the enduring idea of a mythical West and qualified him as a place-defining novelist (Shortridge 1991). My mapping and analysis of Grey's settings lead me to contend that he shaped popular attitudes about the extent of the boundaries of the West and the location of its core. Furthermore, the temporal settings of these novels proved integral to continuing popular acceptance of the western myth. I also illustrate how Grey's evocative portrayal of the landscape and social characteristics of the region is representative of western imagery. I discuss modern ramifications of Grey's imagery in each section, and a review of the western myth making that preceded Grey and his unparalleled record of popularity provides the context for understanding his power of place definition.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN MYTHS

The image of a region as large as the West is complex. Its most central and enduring theme is that of the frontier, a vast and stunning landscape where brave cowboys, rugged individualism, and dream fulfillment are the rule. Some of the common elements of popular western literature, especially pastoral innocence and deadly violence, may be traced to James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales" (Hart 1950). Dime novels by E. Z. C. Judson (alias Ned Buntline) and others created new heroes: Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill were bolder and younger than Leatherstocking and used horses and repeating rifles to battle the harsh elements of the Great Plains (Smith 1950).

Novelists were not alone in shaping western myths. Newspapers extensively covered Billy the Kid's adventures and the shootout at the O.K. Corral (Estleman 1987). The Indian-killing and heroine-rescuing exploits of cowboys were adapted straight from dime novels into the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, which ran from the 1870s to the 1910s (Riegel 1947). The first wave of painters to popularize the West was epitomized by Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran. Their sweeping canvases of outstanding natural features depicted the region as an unspoiled and magnificent wonderland (Kinsey 1992). People, if even present, were reduced to insignificant figures standing in awe of nature. By the end of the nineteenth century, Frederic Remington and Charles Russell portrayed the landscape as spectacular but beginning to come under the control of mountain men, cowboys, and Indians.

Even though the cowboy had become popular by the end of the nineteenth century, he did not supersede all other western heroes, and he was not always portrayed as a hero (Boatright 1980). When dime novels acquired a trashy reputation toward the end of the nineteenth century, eastern publishers searched for a writer who could address the colorful characters of the West more seriously (Athearn 1986). The search culminated in 1902 with Owen Wister, "a Pennsylvanian who sat in South Carolina to write a book about a Virginian living in Wyoming" (Marsden 1978, 207). His popular novel, "The Virginian," praised the action and romance of the frontier that, according to this tale and to Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 frontier thesis, had just disappeared. Wister's innovative combination of cowboys versus rustlers, the transforming power of good woman's love, and the main-street shootout changed the course of stories about the West, but the main significance of "The Virginian" was that it paved the way for Zane Grey (Nye 1970).

## GREY'S WRITING CAREER

Pearl Zane Gray was born in 1872 in Zanesville, Ohio, and died in 1939 in Altadena, California. In adulthood he dropped the first name and changed the spelling of his surname to Grey. As a teenager he excelled at

baseball and fishing, hobbies that would later spark his first writing endeavors. Attending the University of Pennsylvania on a baseball scholarship, he reluctantly pursued dentistry, as had his father. After graduation in 1896 Grey opened a dental practice in New York City, but fishing on the upper Delaware River and playing club baseball were his favorite pursuits. With publication of a fishing story in the journal *Recreation* in 1902, Grey's dream of being an author sprang to life.

Grey soon abandoned dental work to write a novel based on the heroism of his ancestor Betty Zane, whose dash through a hail of bullets with a tablecloth full of gunpowder rescued Fort Henry from an attack by the British and Indians in 1782. "Betty Zane" was published in 1903 but sold poorly. Two more novels of the Ohio frontier, "The Spirit of the Border" and "The Last Trail," also sold slowly after they were published in 1906 and 1909 (Gruber 1970). These stories of revenge against renegade whites and Indians were dramatic, but they were written in the mold of Cooper. The public wanted fresh stories about the trans-Mississippi West, so in 1907 Grey seized an opportunity to go on an expedition to rope mountain lions in northern Arizona with an old plainsman, Charles Jesse "Buffalo" Jones. Grey was struck by the beauty, openness, and people of the intermontane West, and the experiences of that journey became the basis of his first western novels.

"The Heritage of the Desert," his first big success and first western, was published in 1910 (Fig. 1). It describes a sick easterner, Jack Hare, who regains his health in the care of a stalwart Mormon named August Naab. Jack falls in love with Mescal, Naab's adopted half-Navajo-half-Spanish daughter, and eventually rescues her after she flees to the Painted Desert to escape a disgraceful marriage to Naab's outlaw son. From this time on, although he continued to publish occasional fishing, hunting, and juvenile tales, Grey devoted most of his writing to romance novels set in the West. His effect on place images and his fame came almost entirely from the fifty-five westerns that were initially published by Harpers. All of his westerns have been reprinted countless times and are still in print; "Riders of the Purple Sage" is the legendary model for what American readers came to expect from the genre (Goble 1973). The publisher initially rejected the manuscript because of its harsh treatment of polygamy and the Mormon hierarchy, but the reluctance was overcome after an enthusiastic reading by the publisher's wife.

Grey's popularity was unprecedented in its time and is impressive even by present-day standards. His fame peaked from 1917 to 1924, when his books made Bookman's top ten best-seller list every year; he topped the list in 1918 and 1920 with "The U.P. Trail" and "The Man of the Forest." By 1936 more than twelve million copies of Grey's books had been sold (Mott 1947). On an estimate that there were five readers for every book sold, Grey had been read by more than 60 million people by the 1930s,

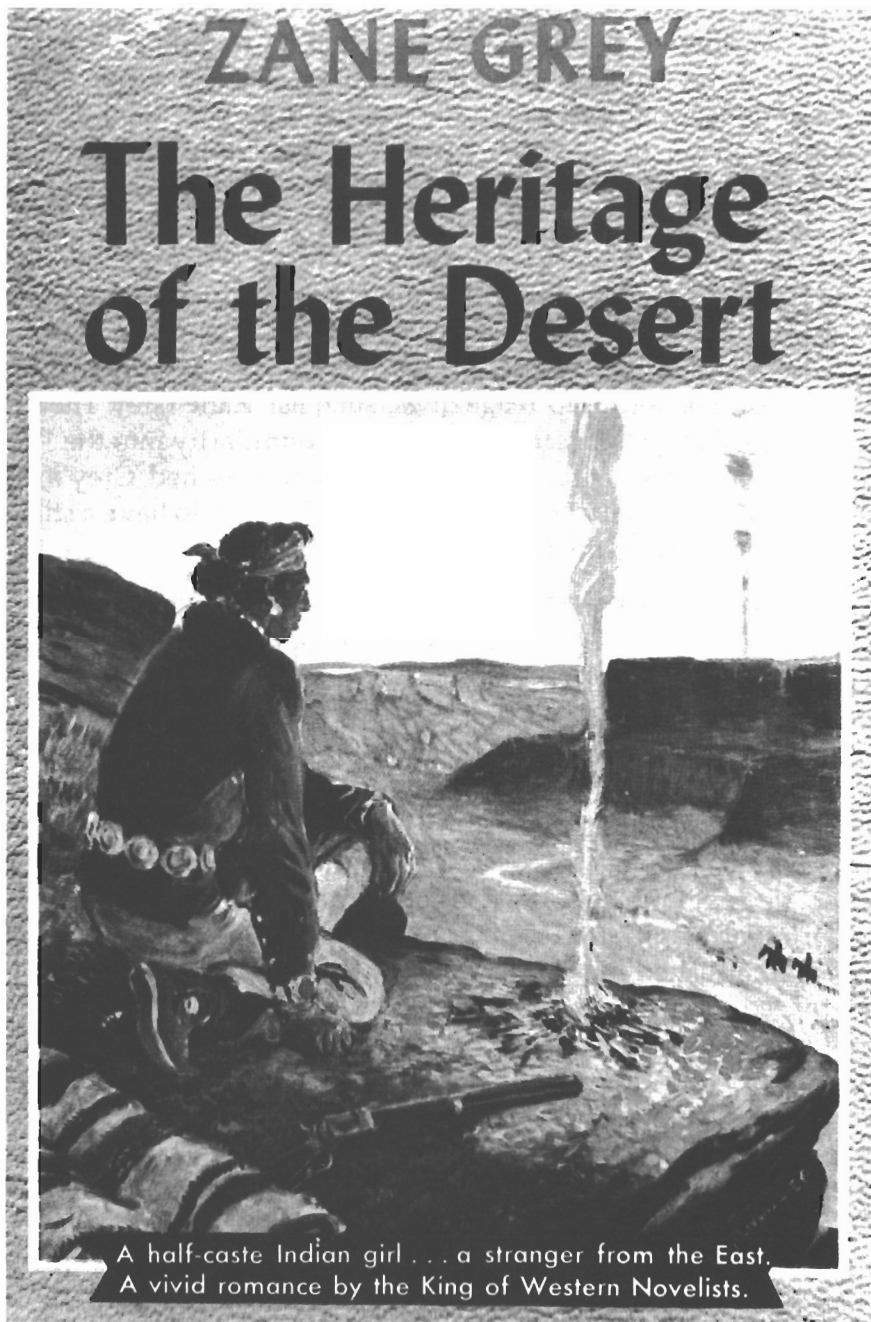


FIG. 1—Front dust jacket for a Grosset & Dunlap Great Western edition of Zane Grey's first western novel (1910).

one-half of the population of the United States (Wellman 1939). Grey's cumulative worldwide sales were estimated at 68 million in 1953, 100 million in 1975, and 130 million in 1984 (Hutchinson 1980; Kant 1984).

Grey's domineering presence in the print and motion-picture media diffused his version of the West to an ever widening audience and reinforced his role as the stereotype of the genre that he in large part made famous. His regular serializations in major periodicals, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Collier's*, *Country Gentleman*, and *McCall's*, commanded top dollar, as did the movie rights to his novels. More than one hundred movies were based on his books, and his name on a marquee was often in bigger letters than were those of great movie stars (Wellman 1939). Television westerns and pulp magazines, such as "Zane Grey Theater" and *Zane Grey's Western Magazine*, extended his popularity into the 1950s and beyond. No other writer of westerns has approached Grey's sustained popularity, and only Louis L'Amour would seem to have a chance at equaling this record in the future.

#### REGIONAL DELIMITATION AND LOCALIZATION

Many current scholars agree that the West begins around the ninety-eighth meridian, which, perhaps not coincidentally, dovetails with Grey's interpretation of the West's eastern margin. His exclusion of coastal California from his West also matches a common perception of the region's western boundary. Several subregions within the West had not developed any place-defining literature before 1950, perhaps because the powerful, enduring appeal of West as a regional label mentally unified the distinctive geographies of the region (Shortridge 1991). I contend that Grey's portrayal of all areas of the West as having the same frontier elements accomplished this unification.

Grey placed some of the action of his novels in nearly every western state, but often with the same set of images (Fig. 2 and Table I). As an example, one of his most popular books, "Nevada," set in eastern Arizona, was a sequel to "Forlorn River," set in northeastern California. Grey's readers received the message that these two locales were part of the same region. Treks by his characters also bonded far-flung locales into one perceptual region. For example, the first pages of "Wyoming" relate the journeys of the protagonists across Nebraska and the Black Hills to a ranch in central Wyoming. Other novels feature significant action in two or more settings that are too disparate and distant from each other to map as one locale. Further evidence that Grey's imagery delimits the West as one region with a uniform set of mythical symbols is his occasional reference to the action or characters of one book in another. His settings have an added importance, in that they were based on real places, in contrast to the inexplicit settings of some authors like Max Brand.

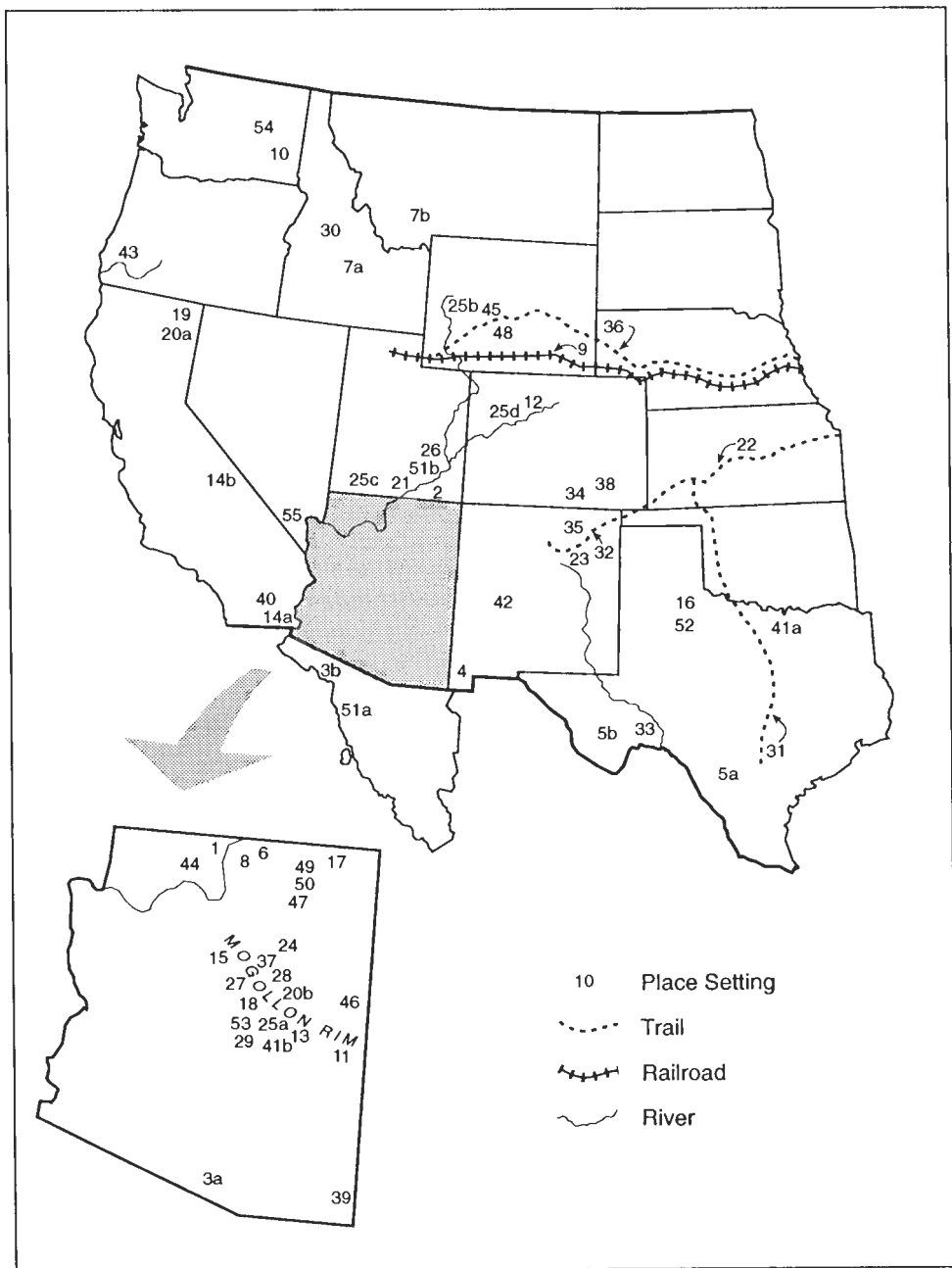


FIG. 2—Settings of Zane Grey's western novels in the American West and Sonora, Mexico. Numbers are keyed to Table I.

Although Grey demonstrated that Old West adventures could be found throughout the West, he concentrated his most powerful imagery in the Colorado Plateau and its southern edge, the Mogollon Rim. Nearly

TABLE I—PLACE AND TEMPORAL SETTINGS OF ZANE GREY'S WESTERNS<sup>a</sup>

MAP NO.	TITLE	YEAR PUB.	PLACE SETTING	TEMPORAL SETTING
1	"The Heritage of the Desert"	1910	Arizona: Lees Ferry, Painted Desert	ca. 1878
2	"Riders of the Purple Sage"	1912	Utah: southeastern Arizona: Tsegi Canyon	1871
3	"Desert Gold"	1913	a) Arizona: Altar Valley b) Sonora: Pinacate Range	1912
4	"The Light of Western Stars"	1914	New Mexico: Peloncillo Mountains	1912
5	"The Lone Star Ranger"	1915	a) Texas: Nueces River headwaters b) Texas: Alpine	1870s
6	"The Rainbow Trail"	1915	Arizona: Tsegi Canyon Utah: Rainbow Bridge	1886
7	"The Border Legion"	1916	a) Idaho: central b) Montana: Virginia City, Alder Gulch	1863
8	"Wildfire"	1917	Arizona: Lees Ferry, Monument Valley	ca. 1880
9	"The U.P. Trail"	1918	Union Pacific Railroad (Omaha to Promontory Point) Wyoming: Laramie Mountains	1864-1869
10	"The Desert of Wheat"	1919	Washington: southeastern	1917-1918
11	"The Man of the Forest"	1920	Arizona: White Mountains, Pinedale	ca. 1885
12	"The Mysterious Rider"	1921	Colorado: Gore Range, Middle Park	ca. 1890
13	"To the Last Man"	1922	Arizona: Pleasant Valley	1887
14	"Wanderer of the Wasteland"	1923	a) California: Chocolate Mountains b) California: Death Valley	1878-1892
15	"The Call of the Canyon"	1924	Arizona: Oak Creek Canyon	1920-1921
16	"The Thundering Herd"	1925	Texas: Red River & Pease River headwaters, Llano Estacado	1875-1877
17	"The Vanishing American"	1925	Arizona: Kayenta Utah: Valley of the Gods, Navajo Mountain	1916-1919
18	"Under the Tonto Rim"	1926	Arizona: Tonto Basin	1920s
19	"Forlorn River"	1927	California: Tule Lake	ca. 1890
20	"Nevada"	1928	a) California: Tule Lake b) Arizona: Chevelon Canyon	ca. 1890
21	"Wild Horse Mesa"	1928	Utah: Kaiparowits Plateau	ca. 1890
22	"Fighting Caravans"	1929	Santa Fe Trail Kansas: Fort Larned	1856-1870
23	"The Shepherd of Guadalupe"	1930	New Mexico: Las Vegas	1919-1920
24	"Sunset Pass"	1931	Arizona: Sunset Mountains	ca. 1885
25	"Arizona Ames"	1932	a) Arizona: Hellsgate on Tonto Creek b) Wyoming: Pinedale c) Utah: Hurricane Cliffs d) Colorado: Troublesome Creek in Middle Park	ca. 1892-1905
26	"Robbers' Roost"	1932	Utah: Dirty Devil River	1877
27	"The Drift Fence"	1933	Arizona: Flagstaff, Mogollon Rim	1889
28	"The Hash Knife Outfit"	1933	Arizona: Mogollon Rim	1889-1890
29	"Code of the West"	1934	Arizona: Tonto Basin	1920s
30	"Thunder Mountain"	1935	Idaho: Salmon River Mountains	1906

TABLE I—*Continued*

MAP NO.	TITLE	YEAR PUB.	PLACE SETTING	TEMPORAL SETTING
31	"The Trail Driver"	1936	Chisholm and western cattle trails Texas: Colorado River crossing	1871
32	"The Lost Wagon Train"	1936	Santa Fe Trail New Mexico: Fort Union	1861–1879
33	"West of the Pecos"	1937	Texas: Pecos River Horsehead Crossing, Langtry	1865–1871
34	"Raiders of Spanish Peaks"	1938	Colorado: Spanish Peaks	1880s
35	"Knights of the Range"	1939	New Mexico: Cimarron	1874–1875
36	"Western Union"	1939	Western Union telegraph route (Omaha to Fort Bridger) Nebraska: Chimney Rock	1861
37	"30,000 on the Hoof"	1940	Arizona: Mogollon Rim, Miller Canyon	1884–1918
38	"Twin Sombreros"	1941	Colorado: Las Animas	1880
39	"Majesty's Rancho"	1942	Arizona: San Bernardino Valley	1932
40	"Stairs of Sand"	1943	California: Salton Sea	1896
41	"Shadow on the Trail"	1946	a) Texas: Denton County b) Arizona: Tonto Basin, Doubtful Canyon	1878–1885
42	"Valley of Wild Horses"	1947	New Mexico: Magdalena	ca. 1880
43	"Rogue River Feud"	1948	Oregon: Rogue River	1920
44	"The Deer Stalker"	1949	Arizona: Kaibab Plateau, Grand Canyon	1924
45	"The Maverick Queen"	1950	Wyoming: South Pass City	1889
46	"The Dude Ranger"	1951	Arizona: Springerville	ca. 1890
47	"Captives of the Desert"	1952	Arizona: Black Mesa	1920s
48	"Wyoming"	1953	Wyoming: Antelope Hills	1930
49	"Lost Pueblo"	1954	Arizona: Tsegi Canyon	1920s
50	"Black Mesa"	1955	Arizona: Black Mesa	ca. 1900
51	"Stranger from the Tonto"	1956	a) Sonora: Altar Desert b) Utah: Hole in the Rock	ca. 1890
52	"The Fugitive Trail"	1957	Texas: Brazos River headwaters	ca. 1880
53	"The Arizona Clan"	1958	Arizona: Tonto Basin	1880s
54	"Horse Heaven Hill"	1959	Washington: Colville Indian Reservation	ca. 1910
55	"Boulder Dam"	1963	Nevada: Hoover Dam	1932

<sup>a</sup>Multiple place settings are listed when significant action occurs in more than one location or across state lines. The actual place-name of the setting is listed, even if Grey used a different name. The temporal settings listed are as specific as can be determined from events in the book.

one-half of his westerns were set there, and the same ratio of his best-selling books were also placed there (Hackett 1967). His focus on Arizona and southern Utah as the heart of his West was continued in the numerous movies based on his tales that he insisted be shot on location. Grey thus introduced Hollywood to Monument Valley in the 1920s (Kant 1984). Of course, popular accounts of western places that were unexplored by Grey certainly exist, so his views have not totally dominated the public's



spatial perception of the West. Even so, I assert that many people still continue to view Grey's Colorado Plateau as the quintessential West. The current popularity of mystery writer Tony Hillerman, who also sets his stories in the Four Corners region, strengthens Grey's earlier localization.

The compelling characters and vivid landscapes in Grey's Colorado Plateau novels have influenced tourism and vernacular images in this area. The region has not had to struggle to attract American or foreign tourists; the famous Grand Circle tour of several of the most popular national parks in the United States is through the heart of Grey's West. Tour books published by the American Automobile Association include Grey on the suggested reading list for Arizona. Residents of Payson, Arizona, call the area Zane Grey Country, and a promotion for the Canyonlands region in Utah features the phrase "the land of Zane Grey."

#### TEMPORAL SETTINGS

Typical of the western genre, most of Grey's novels are set in the late nineteenth century, but their chronology actually extends from the 1850s to the 1930s. In choosing these settings, Grey contributed more than have most writers to the idea that the frontier West is both a historical and current reality, which explains why the temporal mythical West is not rigidly defined. Current ties of his name with western places indicate that the West he portrayed is perceived to be alive, which, in turn, has arguably affected the national psyche.

Nineteen of Grey's westerns are set in the twentieth century. He mixes contemporary events such as World War I, revolutions in Mexico, large-scale dam construction, and increasing automobile use with traditional frontier elements. He suggests not only that the frontier was intact in some places but also that it could be safely visited because heroes resided there to protect innocent travelers. In the forewords he wrote in 1915 for "The Rainbow Trail" and "The Lone Star Ranger" he explicitly asserted that the frontier character and wildness of the West persisted. Promotional material on the original dust jackets for his westerns echoed those sentiments by relating that his material came from his extensive travel in out-of-the-way places of the West. In the twentieth-century setting of "Majesty's Rancho" the West is diminished in area but still challenging. The cowboy hero and college-student heroine leave bustling Los Angeles to find frontier excitement in a remote corner of southeastern Arizona. Early-1930s imagery appears throughout: prohibition is almost over; Al Capone-style gangsters rustle cattle with trucks at night; and there are much cigarette smoking and use of slang and curse words.

Although the West is predominantly an urban society, much of the public still believes that the frontier has not been completely displaced, arguably because Grey wrote of its survival into the twentieth century. Tourism associations try to fulfill these expectations by funneling travel-

ers to places like Tombstone, Arizona, and Dodge City, Kansas, where the Wild West supposedly lives on. The current use of Grey's name in Oregon, Arizona, and Utah travel literature implies that tourists believe his West still persists.

Grey's formula had none of the sappiness over a disappearing frontier that characterized the writing of Owen Wister, Frederic Remington, and Emerson Hough (Bold 1987). Grey's interpretation that the idealized West endured, if one looked in the right places, may have calmed public concerns over losing the frontier. Availability of cheap land can act as a safety valve for burgeoning populations dissatisfied with densely settled areas, but once the frontier is settled there can be tremendous political unrest and social upheaval in a country. Instead of protesting the loss of a frontier, however, Americans celebrated its existence nostalgically through the western genre.

#### LANDSCAPE IMAGES

Grey portrayed the landscape as both setting and character with narratives of a sublime and magnificent country that could clarify the difference between good and evil characters (Kimball 1993). Furthermore, his descriptions of western landscapes rank among the most striking ever written and are still valued for their ability to capture the character of places. Although some of his westerns, like "Stairs of Sand," have mechanistic plots and a simple-minded portrayal of social traits, they all have a distinct sense of place. The memorable qualities of his landscape imagery enhanced the popularity of western places, but this resulted in problems of high visitation.

His heroes and heroines often start out from typical backgrounds in the East but change in the West. At first the landscape seems harsh to these characters, but then it becomes familiar and finally benevolent. I find the comment that to Grey "nature is benign if not innocent" misleading (Byrkit 1992, 361). In Grey's West the heroes rise to the challenges of nature and benefit from it, whereas the villains degenerate in the face of a brutal land.

Grey's colorful descriptions of scenery and his subordination of characters to the landscape result in his readers' both respecting the places he portrayed and desiring to visit them. He placed emphasis both on appreciating natural beauty and on encouraging interaction with the landscape, a duality epitomized today in the challenge of balancing environmental protection and tourism in national parks. Grey wrote as though a sacred but somehow approachable spirit resided in the western landscape, as in this example from "The Rainbow Trail" (1915, 335):

The Rainbow Bridge was the one great natural phenomenon, the one grand spectacle, which Shefford had ever seen that did not at first give

vague disappointment, a confounding of reality, a disenchantment of contrast with what the mind had conceived.

But this thing was glorious. It silenced him, yet did not awe or stun. His body and brain, weary and dull from the toil of travel, received a singular and revivifying freshness. He had a strange, mystic perception of this rosy-hued stupendous arch of stone, as if in a former life it had been a goal he could not reach.... Here at last, apparently, was the rainbow of his boyish dreams and of his manhood—a rainbow magnified even beyond those dreams, no longer transparent and ethereal, but solidified, a thing of ages, sweeping up majestically from the red walls, its iris-hued arch against the blue sky.

Grey was one of the first writers to exploit much of the West's desert and mountain landscape. His desert descriptions are varied and may have produced an unclear picture of what to expect in the arid West. The region is alternatively portrayed as a sandy wasteland, as in "Stairs of Sand," a place of wealth, as in "Desert Gold," a land that develops latent possibilities into greatness, as in "The Heritage of the Desert," a productive area, as in "The Desert of Wheat," and a colorful natural landscape, as in "Riders of the Purple Sage." In "The Vanishing American," he further popularized the desert by calling it a "land of enchantment," a phrase New Mexico adopted as its slogan in the 1930s. In Grey's West enterprising people could always procure more water to make the desert bloom, an attitude that persists in the expectation of many western urbanites to fuel regional growth.

#### SOCIAL THEMES

During Grey's era westerns were mass produced and subject to certain rules of standardization. Because those circumstances did not encourage unique works of art, the main significance of westerns is the formula used to crank them out (Cawelti 1980). Not all of Grey's westerns follow an identical formula, especially stories like "The Shepherd of Guadaloupe" that deal with returning World War I veterans, but certain social characterizations are constant throughout his work. His social commentary added to his place definition by reflecting and influencing the popular image of the West's cultural heritage. He characterized westerners with specific traits that as a group set the standard for what is now a cherished part of western folklore.

Most of Grey's westerns focus on a cattle culture imbued with individualism, rustling, and justified violence. Even though cowboys were featured in dime novels and "The Virginian," critics agree that Grey was the true creator of the cowboy novel (Milton 1980). His technique was to romanticize the shooting accuracy and chivalry of cowboys, but his heroes also could be dirty, sore, foulmouthed, and drunk. The heavy use of cowboy imagery in present-day advertising indicates the widespread

acceptance of Grey's approach: the Marlboro Man is the archetype of these advertisements (Salter 1983).

Grey also popularized mineral prospectors, whom he portrayed as driven by powerful forces into the wilderness where they became larger-than-life. In "Wanderer of the Wasteland" Adam Larey, after apparently murdering his brother, takes to prospecting in the Mojave Desert, where he gains a reputation as a trustworthy avenger of evil by killing thieves with his bare hands. Unable to abandon a life of isolation, he becomes known as Wansfell the Wanderer and devotes his life to befriending the unfortunate.

As a result of the hero worship lavished on cowboys and prospectors, their modern equivalents may have received preferential treatment. For example, even though the land may be owned by the federal government, ranchers have mostly done whatever they wanted on the western grazing lands they lease, and they expect to continue doing so (Marston 1991). Ranchers are often observed to act tough and individualistic; might this partly be role playing because of their perceived heritage? Americans may accept these actions because ranchers are part of the beloved western myth. Environmentalists may call for revisions strengthening the fee payment and reclamation provisions of the public rangeland grazing law and the 1872 mining law, but I contend that the enduring cowboy and prospector romanticism partially thwarts these demands.

One of Grey's main contributions to the western novel and to ideas about acceptable behavior in the West is his introduction of the professional gunman, a role that was later embellished by Shane and Destry (Cawelti 1976). Grey's typical gunman is not vile, but rather a lone figure who metes out deadly justice to rustlers and kidnappers. The most memorable characterization is that of leather-clad Lassiter in "Riders of the Purple Sage" (1912, 7-8):

Jane Withersteen wheeled and saw a horseman, silhouetted against the western sky, coming riding out of the sage. He had ridden down from the left, in the golden glare of the sun, and had been unobserved till close at hand. An answer to her prayer!

"Do you know him? Does any one know him?" questioned Tull, hurriedly....

"Look!" hoarsely whispered one of Tull's companions. "He packs two black-butted guns—low down—they're hard to see—black agin them black chaps."

"A gun-man!" whispered another. "Fellers, careful now about movin' your hands."

The sensational gunplay in Grey's novels became one of his trademarks. He felt he could not express the essence of the frontier West if he omitted the fight or the blood. "Desert Gold" contains a memorable orgy of violence involving the southwestern landscape in which a Yaqui Indian

forces a Mexican bandit to plunge off a volcanic cliff into an expanse of cholla cacti, on which he is impaled. Vivid imagery of this type has been parlayed into hundreds of movies, books, television shows, and magazine stories. Grey's progeny include western writers such as Luke Short, Max Brand, Will Henry, Ernest Haycox, and Louis L'Amour (Malone and Etulain 1989). Edward Abbey (1994) acknowledged Grey as one of his favorite modern novelists; the climax of Abbey's novel "Good News" borrows the cliff-and-cactus drama from "Desert Gold."

Cultural groups that were exotic to readers, such as Navajos and Mormons, were a staple of Grey's westerns, and he dealt with them in a thoughtful manner that was far ahead of his time. He usually portrayed Indians as either noble and worthy of emulation or as victims of bad whites. In "Black Mesa" a white trader illegally sells liquor to Navajos and poisons their only source of water. The plot of "The Vanishing American" exposes corruption in the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and has a Navajo hero with an athletic prowess reminiscent of Jim Thorpe. Grey originally ended this novel with a marriage of the Navajo and the white heroine, but after pressure from his publisher he rewrote the ending—the hero dies of influenza. The brisk sales of this novel in 1925 suggest that Grey's sympathetic view of American Indians struck a popular chord, but it would be even more characteristic of the increasingly sensitive views of them since the 1960s.

Grey was one of the first popular writers to discuss Mormon beliefs seriously (Coan and Lillard 1967). He admired Mormon industriousness and even stated that Jim Emmett, the Mormon manager of Lees Ferry, was the man who influenced him the most (Stott 1978). But Grey despised the church's treatment of women, especially polygamy. After spending much time among Mormons Grey decided that the younger church members were starting a trend away from polygamy, a shift positively portrayed in "The Rainbow Trail." Nevertheless, he was ambivalent in "The Man of the Forest," in which the group is depicted both as suspected abductors of women and as trustworthy outdoorsmen who value justice.

For Grey and his readers the West is a place with restorative powers, an escape from the banality and immorality of the older parts of the United States. His heroes and heroines are disenchanted with the ostentation, shallowness, and softness of the East. In "The Call of the Canyon" a shell-shocked and gassed World War I veteran feels unappreciated by eastern socialites and opts for a simple life of hard, manual work in remote Oak Creek Canyon of Arizona. His flapper girlfriend objects to the simplicity of the West, and they separate when he accuses her of not being woman enough or American enough to stay and help him reconstruct his broken life. They reconcile only when she realizes her love of the wide-open landscape and decides to devote her life to ranching and raising a family in the West.

Western imagery also promotes the region as a land of unbounded economic opportunity (Vale and Vale 1989). Grey popularized this ideal too, often by having his hard-working cowboys reap financial and romantic rewards commensurate with their heroic deeds. The happy-ending syndrome is taken to miraculous extremes in "Desert Gold," in which in a span of minutes a Yaqui Indian leads the hero to a gold mine, the source of the only river in the region, and an old box containing a letter that clears the reputation of his sweetheart.

#### PERSISTENT IMAGERY

The imagery in Grey's novels is a definitive expression of the mainstream conception of cultural characteristics in the West, what its ideal scenery looks like, and where and when the Wild West existed. These novels are a window into the values of a large segment of past and current generations that enjoy the ritualistic winning of the West. The adoption of western iconography as representative of the entire country must also in some way result from Grey. The West defines how Americans view their past, and this region, more than any other, is the source of American identity, pride, and cherished heroes.

Grey is a place-defining novelist for the West because of his immense and enduring popularity and his embellishment of preexisting western images with graphic portrayals of life in the West. The two new mass-market paperback editions of his westerns released since 1990 may further extend his influence. The use of his evocative writings in anthologies that tout the appreciation of western wildlife and landscapes also keeps Grey's imagery prominent. Nevertheless, his effect on western images would have been transient had he not imparted his own distinct sense of the areal and temporal extent of the West of American imagination.

The legends of the West satisfy important needs, but too much reliance on the myth leads to unrealistic views of the West and to misguided behavior. Grey was fairly accurate about the temporal and spatial settings of the topics of which he wrote, but he focused on remote places in a period of time when many aspects of the West, such as its population and resource base, were far different from what they are now. The better the myth is known, the better its effects can be recognized and, if need be, clarified or revised. Grey's mythical West is too popular and too central to the identity of the West and the United States to be abandoned completely. The goal is to flavor the real West with carefully chosen parts of Grey's imagery.

#### CITATIONS

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