

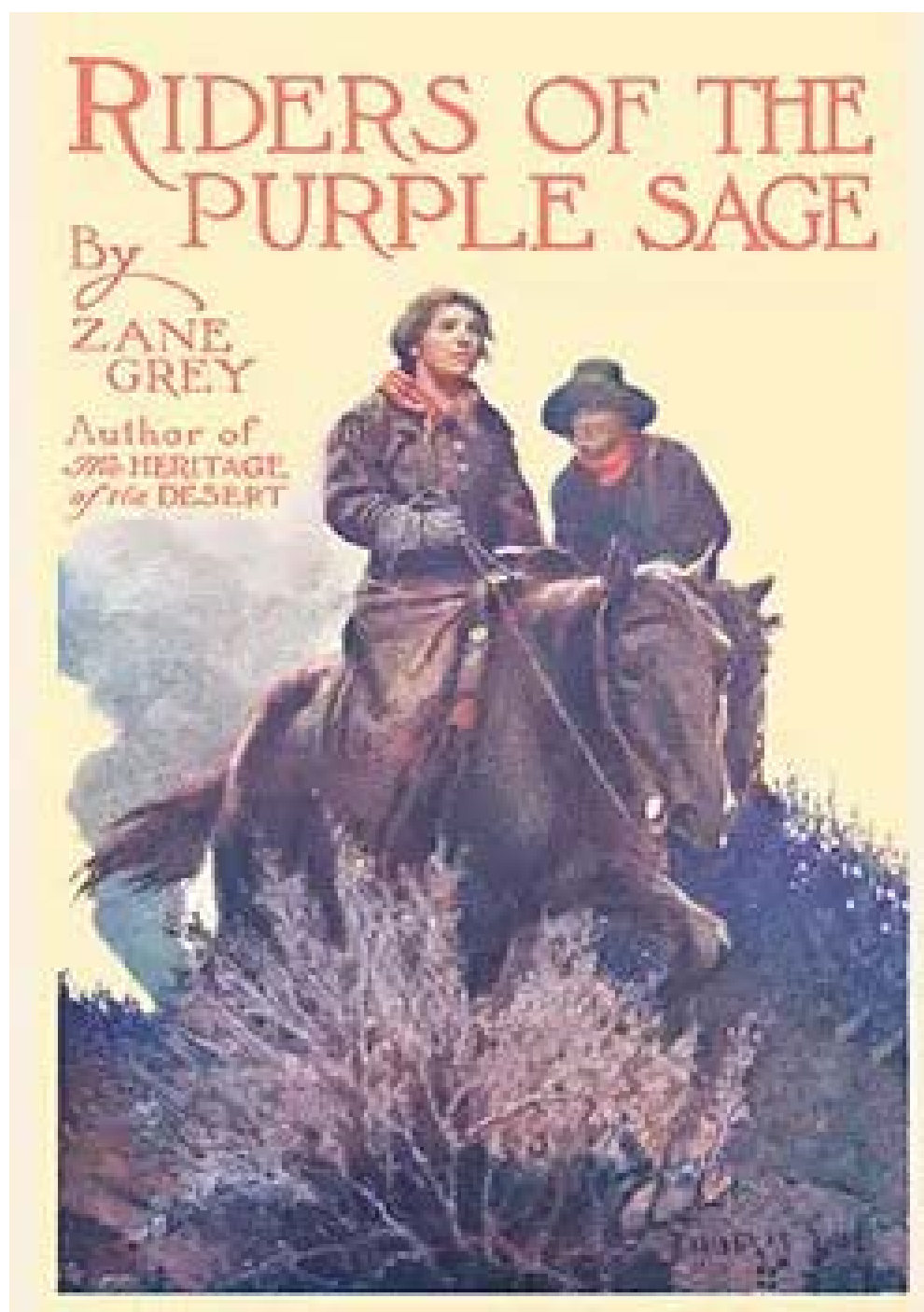
RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE

Synopsis and Research Summaries

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Zane Grey's West Society



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INTRODUCTION

RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE was not Zane Grey's first western romance novel. That distinction is held by *The Heritage of the Desert* published in 1910. In *Riders of the Purple Sage* the author expressed what appears to have been his disgust with the Utah Mormon practice of polygamy (polygyny), authoritarian rule, religious persecution and gender inequality. The author seems to avoid showing sympathy for extremists on either side of philosophical battles. The ending of this novel appears to illustrate the author's hope for reconciliation as a Gentile father, a Mormon mother, and a creedless child are isolated in a valley where they can live together in harmony. Several themes in the novel are characteristic of those appearing in many other of the author's works, namely, attempts, often by women, to get a gunslinger to lay down his guns; romance that blossoms between protagonists, one of which often engenders the love of another due to care given to a sick or wounded partner; gunfights; kidnapping; conflict between good guys and bad guys; cattle- and sheep-rustling; horse-theft; and battles over land and water sources. Most scholars agree that *Riders of the Purple Sage* is the most popular western novel of all time.

LIST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

(XX) Indicates the page where each character first appears in the Walter J. Black, Inc., edition of **RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE**.

- **Jane Withersteen (3)**...a devout Mormon who speaks her mind. She inherits a Utah ranch from her rich Mormon father. She is chastised by Mormon leaders who believe she should marry a Mormon and turn her holdings over to the church. She is engaged in a struggle between her religion and her love for a Gentile man. She helps all people regardless of their religion.
- **Elder Tull (4)**...a persistent, vulgar man who wants to marry Jane in order to secure her ranch and wealth for the church. He hates Lassiter and directs attacks against Jane, her land, her ranch and her cattle.
- **Bern Venters (4)**...Jane's lead rider who helps her manage the ranch, and who develops a romantic relationship with her. Mormons and other villagers despise him and harass him because he is a Gentile.
- **Fay Larkin (5)**...a young girl whose dying mother placed her under the care of Jane Withersteen requesting Jane to raise the young girl as a Gentile in order to prevent the girl from ever becoming the wife of a Mormon man. Fay is later kidnapped by Mormons hoping to raise her as a Mormon to become a future Mormon wife.
- **Jim Lassiter (8, 12)**...a western cowboy with a gunslinger reputation and strong anti-Mormon feelings. He uses his guns in what he believes are fights for justice. He is on a quest to locate his long-lost sister and seeking revenge against the Mormon man who kidnapped her years earlier.

- **Milly Erne (16)**...the long-lost sister of Lassiter who had become a slave held captive in Mormon society. She had given birth to a child in captivity, but the child had been taken from her by Mormon elders. She was a friend of Jane Withersteen who knew her secrets and her burial site.
- **Oldring (20)**...a rustler with close ties to the Mormons, despite the fact that he was not a Mormon. He and his supporters rustle cattle and intimidate non-Mormons.
- **Elizabeth “Bess” Erne (22, 103)**...a “secret” rider who accompanies Oldring pretending to be a masked man. She falls in love with the man who shoots her and later rescues her. Later readers learn she is the long-lost child of Milly Erne, not Oldring’s daughter, and that she is Lassiter’s niece.
- **Judkins (33)**...one of Jane’s loyal non-Mormon ranch hands or riders who watch her cattle. He is wounded while trying to protect the cattle from rustlers.
- **Jerry Card (60)**...leader of “The Riders”, a vigilante group, also Tull’s man.
- **Bishop Dyer (66, 125)**...a high-ranking Mormon leader whose orders his members strictly follow. He is dedicated to seeing Jane marry the Mormon Tull and get control of her wealth and land for the church.
- **Bivens (76)**...storekeeper for Jane Withersteen.
- **Mrs. Larkin (77)**...Fay’s mother who died.

SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1. Jane Withersteen is twenty-eight years old in 1871. She lives on a large ranch, which she inherited from her Mormon father. The ranch includes Amber Spring, the source of water for her cattle. She is confronted by a Mormon elder named Tull, a man who has pursued her to become his wife with the hope of eventually getting her ranch and cattle turned over to the Mormon Church. Tull confronts Bern Venters, Jane’s Gentile ranch hand or rider, a man whom Tull believes has a romantic relationship with Jane. Tull also believes Jane intends to adopt a Gentile child named Fay Larkin. As Tull and his Mormon riders attempt to tie up and whip Venters a mounted rider named Lassiter intervenes, eventually causing Tull to back down and leave, and instilling Tull’s hatred for Lassiter.

Chapter 2. Jane invites Lassiter to stay at her ranch, which he declines, preferring to live alone in the wild. Jane learns Lassiter hates Mormons because in the past they cruelly blinded his horse. Lassiter tells Jane he has come to the area at the request of friends in an attempt to locate the grave of a girl named Milly Erne. Jane tells him Milly is buried in a secret grave on her property, and that she is willing to take him to her grave. Venters said he will leave Jane so that the Mormons might leave her alone. Venters said he knows about Milly Erne, except for the name of the Mormon who brought her to the area. Venters said he will go to Deception Pass, where Jane’s cattle are grazing. Deception Pass is a series of confusing intersecting canyons, a natural passage way through mountainous rock cliffs on the borderland of Utah. Jane warns him that Deception Pass is the hideout of the outlaw Oldring. Oldring drives off

some of Jane's cattle, and Venters says he is going to try to find them. Venters sees Oldring and a masked rider who accompanies him.

Chapter 3. Venters and Lassiter meet before riding down into the valley. Venters tells Lassiter he wants to get out of Utah to go see his mother in Quincy, Illinois. Lassiter says he knows Mormons, and the only way for a Gentile to survive is to take up guns against them. He comments on the strange patience and love of Mormon women and what he calls a madness for their God. Venters says he never drew a gun against Tull because Jane took his guns away from him, but that he has saved his Winchester and his Colt and he had been practicing shooting for six months. Lassiter asks Venters about Milly Erne. Venters said she was more of a Mormon than a Gentile, and that she had lived in the village of Cottonwoods and was a Mormon wife. She began to resist Mormon upbringing for her little girl, who eventually disappeared. That broke Milly's heart, and she died. Venters did not know who Milly's Mormon husband was, but he tells Lassiter Jane knew. Venters tells Lassiter that it was Amber Spring that made Jane's father a feudal lord, perhaps a clue of sorts that Milly's child's father may have been Jane's father, making Jane and the little girl sisters, but Venters never even hints such was the case. Jane meets Lassiter and asks him to look at her horses. Jane takes Lassiter to an unmarked, uncared-for grave, where she says she only visits to remember and to pray. Jane asks Venters if it is possible Lassiter may be Milly Erne's husband, the father of the little girl lost so long ago. Jane's rider Judkins approaches Jane and Venters, riding hard, a sign of something bad.

Chapter 4. Jane's rider Judkins informs her that her red herd of twenty-five hundred cattle has been stolen by rustlers. Venters goes looking for the cattle, and he connects their disappearance with the Mormon Tull and the Bishop. He tells Jane that her riders have been called in by the Mormons, so there is no help to drive seven thousand head of cattle. Venters sets off to Deception Pass to see if Oldring is involved with the Mormons in the cattle rustling. In a dry area he finds fresh cattle tracks that are mysterious because they are wet. He finds Oldring's camp. Venters is confronted by two riders approaching him, and he shoots them.

Chapter 5. Venters buries one of the riders under slabs of rock. He discovers that the second rider, Oldring's Masked Rider and without guns, is a woman. He believes he has killed her, until she opens her eyes and moans. He thinks perhaps Oldring had been using the masked woman as a mystery to scare villagers. Venters treats her wounds then leaves her briefly and finds Oldring's cattle in a canyon where there is a waterfall, the source of the water in the earlier cattle tracks. He takes care of the woman until she recovers, and she asks him to not take her back to Oldring's canyon camp.

Chapter 6. Jane learns from Judkins that the Mormons have called in all of her riders, as well as many of her staff members to whom Jane had been kind and paid over the years, making no distinction between Mormons and Gentiles. Judkins tells her a masked man had approached him in the darkness to threaten him if he returned to help Jane. Judkins tells Jane a man named Jerry Card is the leader of Oldring's riders. Jane agrees to allow Judkins to gather as many men as he can and then go to find her white herd. Jane becomes afraid that a deeply hidden

emotion bordering on hate is starting to come out in her, contrary to her Mormon beliefs. She renews her pledge to herself to never marry Tull. Jane attempts to convince Lassiter to never again kill another Mormon as she knows he had come there to kill the man who dragged Milly Erne to hell. Jane says she will never tell him who the man was. Lassiter tells Jane he has found her white herd, and he takes her to see there are men up in the mountains waving blankets trying to stampede the herd over a canyon rim to kill them. Lassiter convinces Jane it is the Mormons, not Oldring, who are trying to stampede the herd. The herd stampedes, and Lassiter heads them off in a dangerous maneuver called "milling"; but his horse is killed in the stampede. Jane prevents Lassiter from running down the outlaws, as he says he will fix them so they never bother her again.

Chapter 7. Jane hires Lassiter as her rider with the goal of keeping him from killing any more Mormons, as she believes that will take the pressure off of her from the Mormons. Mary Brandt, a Mormon wife, encourages Jane to marry Tull. Jane says she will not because she does not love him. Jane goes to the slums of Cottonwoods attempting to find Gentiles to hire to help her, but they refuse saying they have been warned by the Mormon leaders. Mrs. Larkin sends her daughter Fay to ask Jane to come help her. Mrs. Larkin says she is dying, and she wants Jane to look after Fay. She says she does not want Fay to be a Mormon or to marry a Mormon man. Jane invites Mrs. Larkin and Faye to come live with her.

Chapter 8. The masked rider tells Venters her name is Bess. Venters takes care of Bess, and she gets stronger. He finds isolated old Indian cliff dwellings with caves nearby, an ideal location to keep Bess safely away from anyone looking for her. He finds a gigantic balanced rock, which the Indians seemed to have prepared as a defense mechanism that could be rolled down on any intruders. He names the lush, hidden valley inside Deception Pass Surprise Valley. He takes Bess to the cliff dwellings and makes her comfortable in a well-hidden cave. He realizes he himself finally does not feel alone.

Chapter 9. Venters finds a natural arch or bridge that spans the entrance to Surprise Valley, and he feels the Indians must have believed the place to be sacred. As he cares for Bess he vows to himself that he will someday kill Oldring who had held Bess in bondage. He works diligently to build a brush fence across the entrance to the valley. Bess tells Venters her story, that she was Oldring's masked rider, but she has never killed anyone. She tells him Oldring is not a Mormon. She says she hates Oldring's men, and sometimes she hates him for keeping her isolated when he was away for days. Venters tells her he will take her away to a happier life.

Chapter 10. Venters develops the feeling that Bess belongs to him. Bess tells Venters she felt Oldring kept her locked up when he was away because he feared she would run away, and that he never allowed her to meet any women. She tells Venters Oldring is more interested in gold than in cattle rustling, and that he never rustled Mormon cattle. He had only agreed to drive the Mormon cattle, and that the Mormon Jerry Card is on good terms with Oldring's men. Venters slips away from the ruins to raid Oldring's cattle at night so they may have food. Bess makes him stop stealing cattle. Venters sees from her eyes that Bess loves him.

Chapter 11. Fay and her mother move in with Jane, and partly because Fay takes a liking to Lassiter, Jane asks him to visit more often. He visits daily, and Jane spends evenings alone with him, her hope being that she can prevent him from attacking Mormons. Lassiter refuses to let Jane take his guns. Bishop Dyer visits Jane, encourages her to raise Fay as a Mormon, and he orders her to marry Tull. Jane refuses. The Bishop asks why Lassiter came to Cottonwoods. She tells the Bishop he came to kill the man who persuaded Milly Erne to abandon her husband and her God. The Bishop draws a gun on Lassiter, and Lassiter shoots and wounds the Bishop, refraining from killing him. Lassiter asks Jane if she made love to him to keep him from killing her people. She says yes. He is angry she did that, and he is angrier that she brought Fay in to do the same thing. He tells Jane Milly Erne was his sister. He tells Jane her Mormon brothers all carry guns, and she almost ruined Venters by taking his guns away. Jane says she needs Lassiter more than ever. He says he won't go back on her.

Chapter 12. Jane does not reply to the Bishop's written order for her to visit him. Jane realizes her women helpers are spying on her and reporting to the Bishop, including stealing her records and deeds to her property, of which she is very proud. Judkins arrives to tell Jane people are attempting again to frighten the herd, but that he has not lost a single steer. She pays him in gold for his dedication. Blake, another of her riders, returns to help her after his mother dies, and she pays him with gold. Jane discovers her red herd of horses is missing. She asks Blake to watch over her special personal horses. Jane dreams of having to leave her ranch, and she asks Lassiter if he will leave with her if that happens. He tells her she can't leave unless she is completely broken. He asks her to let him make a call on Tull, but she refuses.

Chapter 13. Bess completely recovers, and she and Venters explore the ruins. Venters has to go to Cottonwoods, but he postpones his trip until after the expected imposing storms. Venters tells Bess about his horse Wrangle, who he had left behind when he took Bess to the caves to hide. He tells Bess that love between a man and a woman is what life is all about. She tells him that Oldring and his men believe when one hears the wind blowing a gale in the caverns it is a death knell, "Oldring's knell". Venters holds Bess tightly realizing she is a treasure.

Chapter 14. Venters realizes he is in love with Bess. He plans to go to Cottonwoods for supplies. Bess worries he won't come back, that perhaps there is another woman. He assures her there is no other woman and that he will return. He explains how the Indians wanted to use the Balance Rock as a defense mechanism. There is symbolism in the balance of the rock and the balance of their relationship. Bess calls him Berne and tells him she loves him.

Chapter 15. Mrs. Larkin dies. Lassiter is wounded on the way to Jane's. Venters and Wrangle return to Jane, and he reports he was shot at in the sage on the way. Venters tells them of the valley he has found, and he asks Jane to release him. Venters says he wants to live in the valley, and he asks Jane for supplies. While she is getting the supplies ready Venters goes to Cottonwoods and confronts Tull. He tells Tull he is no longer with Jane, and if he sees Tull again he will kill him. Venters leaves with the supplies, and he kills a man who tries to shoot him. Judkins comes to Jane and reports the Mormons kept harassing the white herd, and it was

finally run off by a natural dust devil. Lassiter follows Venters to the valley. When Lassiter returns he finds Blake, Jane's rider, murdered in the barn and all of Jane's best horses gone. There are signs that Blake likely killed some of those who ambushed him.

Chapter 16. Lassiter visits Venters and Bess at Surprise Valley. He recognizes something about Bess, and Venters tells him everything that had happened. Before Lassiter leaves, he and Venters visit the Balancing Rock, and Lassiter says he has always enjoyed rolling stones. Venters becomes very concerned, and he decides he must leave the valley with Bess. He asks Lassiter to not tell Jane about Bess. Bess tells Venters a secret, namely that she has found lots of gold in his absence. He decides then to tell her his secret, namely that he loves her and that he wants to marry her.

Chapter 17. Venters, riding Wrangle, leaves Bess under the shadow of the Balancing Rock and heads for Cottonwoods where he plans to purchase clothing that will disguise her so they can leave the valley. A group of eight horsemen follow Venters. Venters dismounts and conceals Wrangler in the sagebrush. The riders shoot at Venters. Venters shoots three of the riders. Venters recognizes one of the horses ridden by one of his attackers was Bell, Jane's stolen full bay racer. Venters recognizes Jerry Card riding Jane's horse Black Star and leading her horse Night. Venters chases after the riders testing the horses against each other. Venters shoots the man on Bell. Card changes horses in flight jumping from Black Star to Night then back onto Black Star. Later Card dismounts and runs off into the sage on foot, and Venters checks the two exhausted horses that Card had abandoned. He dismounts to allow Wrangler to rest and graze and drink water. Card finds his way to secretly mount Wrangler and steal him. Failing to hit Card with five shots, Venters shoots Wrangler on the rim of the canyon. Wrangler plunges over into the canyon killing himself and Card.

Chapter 18. Venters rides into Cottonwoods leading three of Jane's horses that he has recovered from his attackers in an effort to show the villagers, Tull, and the Bishop that he had recovered the horses, everyone knowing they had been stolen. He stops briefly at Tull's cottage to let him know he has arrived. He tells the villagers Card will never return, and he tells villagers he knows they have been silenced. Judkins arrives to support Venters. He tells Venters he has seen Lassiter at Snell's Saloon drinking and talking chummy and shaking hands with Oldring. Venters finds Oldring and confronts him telling him his masked rider is alive, but that she is dead to Oldring. Oldring tries to draw on Venters, but Venters shoots him through the heart. As he is dying Oldring tries to tell Venters something. Venters leaves and gets a burro from Jane's corral and heads into the sage. He wonders what Oldring's incomplete last words may have been, and he wonders what Bess had been to Oldring. Venters returns to Bess and demands she tell him the truth before they leave the valley. He comes to believe she is Oldring's daughter. Venters does not tell Bess he killed her father. He tells her he loves her deeply.

Chapter 19. Jane tells Lassiter she and he could never marry because she is still a Mormon. Lassiter asks Jane to take Fay and to leave with him out of Utah. Jane says she will never leave Utah. Lassiter tells Jane how his sister Milly married Frank Erne in Texas, and how a Mormon

minister came through and took Milly away, converting her to Mormonism. He says Milly's death hastened the death of Lassiter's mother. Lassiter had trailed Milly for nearly three years, and he learned she had a baby. Lassiter had found two letters from Milly to Frank Erne, one letter saying she had been bound and gagged and dragged away from her home. She named her abductors as three Mormon men named Hurd, Metzger, and Slack. Her second letter, written two years after the first was from Salt Lake City, telling Frank to forget her, as she had come to love her new husband, and that she was leaving never to be heard of again because if she didn't she would suffer in a way too horrible to tell. Lassiter tells Jane he had found the three kidnappers in Utah and killed them. None of the men would tell Lassiter who Milly's new husband was. Lassiter had searched to learn the man's name for eighteen years until a Gentile friend told him Jane Withersteen could tell him about Milly and show him her grave. Lassiter tells Jane he had come to realize Bishop Dyer had been Milly's Mormon kidnapper. He tells Jane he won't kill the Bishop for Jane's sake. Jane tells Lassiter she still has one secret, but she would only tell him if he was present at her deathbed. As they talked Fay is kidnapped.

Chapter 20. Jane tells Lassiter the Mormons had stolen Milly Erne's child, and that she was willing to surrender and marry Tull in order to get Fay back. Lassiter tells her, "Never!" He tells Jane he is going to see Dyer, and that she should pack the saddlebags and be ready to leave when he returns. Jane pleads with Lassiter not to kill Bishop Dyer. She tells him it was Bishop Dyer who dragged Milly Erne to Utah for her father, and that if ever Milly was a wife of a Mormon that Mormon was her father. Lassiter leaves Judkins with Jane as he goes into the next room, and Judkins tells her Lassiter has killed Bishop Dyer but that he hadn't killed Tull. Judkins explains to Jane how Lassiter killed Dyer in the court room as Dyer was prosecuting some of Jane's riders for a lot of hatched-up things the boys had never done. Lassiter had appeared in the courtroom and called out a name, and two of Dyer's bodyguards jumped out the window. Dyer dove for the floor. Lassiter shot three additional bodyguards. Dyer rose and drew a gun to try to shoot Lassiter. Lassiter shot the gun out of Dyer's hand. Then Dyer tried two more times, each time with Lassiter shooting but not killing him. Then Dyer shot again and hit a man in the room. Then Lassiter shot Dyer several times and killed him. Lassiter had received three minor gunshot wounds, which he was at that time in the next room dressing. Lassiter returns to get Jane and the saddlebags. He tells Judkins to leave with Jane and not to look back. As the two of them leave, Lassiter stays back and sets fire to Jane's house.

Chapter 21. Venters returns to the Indian Cliff Dwelling ruins. Bess finds out about Jane when she sees the packs Jane has prepared for him. Bess and Venters leave the valley on burros. Lassiter and Jane meet up with Venter and Bess in the sage. Jane is jealous of Bess until Venters tells her their story. In hearing Venters tell the story Bess learns he had killed Oldring, whom she believes was her father. Bess says she does not want to leave with Venters. Lassiter then tells Bess she is Frank and Milly Erne's daughter, not Oldring's daughter. Lassiter warns everyone that Tull is likely on their trail. Jane gives her fastest horses to Venters and Bess, encouraging them to go out of Utah. As they ride off, Jane tells Lassiter, "*Bern – Bess – riders of the purple sage – good bye*".

Chapter 22. Venters and Bess see riders off in the distance as they are leaving. He recognizes Tull, but the riders abandon their chase, most likely when they realize Venters and Bess are not Jane and Lassiter. Venters tells Bess that he knows Lassiter will outwit Tull. As they ride on they hear a thundering off in the distance behind them.

Chapter 23. As Jane and Lassiter are riding through the canyons, Lassiter discovers a cabin, and he tells Jane to wait for him as he goes off alone. Jane hears gunshots. Lassiter returns with Fay, who is bruised from a fall. He also has horses he has taken from the camp where Tull's men had held Fay. Tull and his men chase the three of them into a narrow valley, the same valley where Venters and Bess had lived in isolation. Lassiter pushes the Balancing Rock until it rolls over the cliff trapping and killing Tull and his men. Lassiter, Jane and Fay are safe, but they are trapped in the valley. The outlet to Deception Pass is closed forever.

Note: An excellent reference for further study of the background and actual historical events that influenced the author in writing *RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE* is the 2021 book by Stephen J. May titled *ZANE GREY'S RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE – THE REAL STORY BEHIND THE WILD WEST'S GREATEST TALE*. (ISBN 978-1-4930-4901-1)

HELPFUL RESEARCH AND STUDY SUMMARIES

Dr. Joseph L. Wheeler, *Zane Grey's Impact on American Life and Letters: A Study In the Popular Novel* (George Peabody College for Teachers [Vanderbilt] – 1975)

REFERENCES (26, 32, 48, 156-158, 249, 274, 288, 292)

(26) Zane Grey had severe struggles, which he eventually won, with his publisher in regards to censorship and editing of his novel *Riders of the Purple Sage* (**ROTPS**).

(32) Zane Grey scholar Frank Gruber classified Zane Grey's **ROTPS** as a "revenge novel", a novel about someone who has been wronged and the chief protagonist devotes months, years to a relentless pursuit of the wrong-doer, eventually bringing him to retribution. (Frank Gruber, *Zane Grey: A Biography*, 1969)

(48) Gruber also wrote: "The dreaded mysterious gunfighter, whose name is legend, has become the leading man of a thousand Western novels, but it was Zane Grey who first used him so well in **ROTPS** that has determined the universal stereotype of the West."

(156-158) When Grey first took his manuscript for **ROTPS** to the editorial staff of Harpers, they decided the anti-Mormon bias made the book too risky. What these men overlooked were the

epic qualities of the book. The theme: man's inhumanity to man was lost sight of in their obsession with Grey's value judgments on polygamy. They also overlooked the fact that the novel is actually a glorification of the Mormon struggle against overwhelming odds, and that the younger Mormons were not as stern and unbending as the older generation....Gruber considered **ROTPS** and *The U. P. Trail* the two greatest Westerns ever written.

According to Lawrence Clark Powell ("Books Determine", Wilson Library Bulletin, September 1955, p. 63), "The character of the deadly yet noble gunman, Lassiter, approaches the epic folk-hero in the powerful simplification, and was memorably personified by the old-time movie actor William S. Hart – slit-eyed, steel muscled, and claw-fingered on the draw. The final scene...is perhaps the finest moment in all Western fiction, approached only by the Virginian's 'When you call me that, smile'..."

Gruber also considered the race between Venters astride Wrangle and Jerry Card (leap-frogging from Night and Black Star) to be the most magnificent race ever portrayed in a Western.

In all surveys **ROTPS** always seems to rank number one in the ZG canon. Perhaps one reason for the book's success was the reality the characters had to Grey himself; or the way to Nonnezoshe, one of his trips, Grey wrote that when he entered into the canyon he had named Surprise Valley he could not help feeling that **ROTPS** was true, that his dream people had actually lived there once upon a time. In fact, their spirits haunted the place so much he felt subdued, saddened, even awed by the place.

(249) Whipple discusses Grey's treatment of sex using **ROTPS** as an example of a book whose fairyland sexual naivete can be compared to the medieval courtly love tradition. (T.K. Whipple, "American Sagas", The Saturday Review of Literature, 7 February 1925) Medieval too in its simplicity is Grey's heroic ideal, loyalty, generosity, and code of conduct. As far as ethics are concerned, Whipple labels this product as at least Christian-influenced...In his best work, such as **ROTPS**, Whipple sees him as an imaginative mythmaker at work, actually a primitive who is writing the genuine stuff while others merely imitate so as to be in vogue.

(274) One of the scenes in **ROTPS** which has been considered one of the more epic scenes created by American writers is Lassiter and the balancing rock.

(288) An example of Grey's tendency to sometimes espouse the non-thinker's point of view is in **ROTPS**: "'The world seems very far away,' he muttered, 'but it's still there – and I'm not done with it. Perhaps I never shall be....Only – how glorious it would be to live here (Surprise Valley) always and never think again.'"

(292) Far more often than commenting on the need for money was Grey's almost messianic message about the corrupting power of gold; **ROTPS** served as a vehicle for this commentary. According to Grey, gold not only closes the eyes of those obsessed with it to the beauty of the world but it also destroys one's creative drive and family relationships. Not only that but it also

pushes men back down the evolutionary ladder to the level of beasts, causing them to slay one another for temporary possession of the elusive substance.

Charles G. Pfeiffer, *Zane Grey, A Study in Values – Above and Beyond the West*, (Zane Grey's West Society, 2005) (ISBN 0-9768720-0-5)

References (151, 161, 173, 175, 181, 203, 243-253, 345, 415, 448, 464, 471, 477, 526, 464, 471, 477, 511, 521, 526, 557, 562, 581, 600-601)

(151) Grey's belief in the obligation one has to proffer service to others is contrasted in **ROTPS** by Jane Withersteen who is not portrayed as having a sense of need that is ministered to by helping others. She considered that the best work of her life was "work for the welfare and happiness of those among whom she lived, Mormon and Gentile alike."

(161) The deep hatred that launched Lassiter in his eighteen year search for those who ruined his sister eroded and vanished before the onslaught of time, maturity, common sense, and love: "I give up my purpose. I've come to see an' feel differently. I can't help poor Milly. An' I've outgrown revenge. I've come to see I can be no judge for men. I can't kill a man jest for hate. Hate ain't the same with me since I loved you and little Fay."

(173) In **ROTPS** there were close ties that bound brother and sister – that launched Jim Lassiter on an eighteen year search for the abductors of Milly.

(175) While Grey spent much time away from home torn between his need for new adventure and new material and his dependence upon the support of his family, he recognized the importance of family and wrote often of his extended family individually in his journal. It was only natural that this concern for family should find expression in his stories, such as in **ROTPS**, when Bess asks Venters what are "the things for which life is lived", he answers: "Why – I suppose relationship, friendship – love....Love of man for woman – love of woman for man. That's the nature, the meaning, the best of life itself."

(181) Grey realized that nature has equipped woman with all possible means, and knowledge, of how to allure man and preserve the race. For Grey every woman is a natural flirt – however, some have practiced and perfected the art more than others. He writes of Jane Withersteen when she is trying to influence Lassiter to give up his guns: "She made of herself a girl in every variable mood wherein a girl might be desirable. In those moods she was not above the methods of an inexperienced though natural flirt."

(203) Heaven and hell appear in some form in virtually every one of Grey's romances. In **ROTPS** Jane Withersteen is advised by a fellow Mormon, "Marry Tull. It's your duty as a Mormon. You'll feel no rapture as his wife – but think of Heaven! Mormon women don't marry for what they expect on earth."

(243-253) On these pages Pfeiffer discusses the relationship between **ROTPS** and its sequel, *The Rainbow Trail*, as they are both scathing in denunciation of institutional religion where the exaltation of church takes precedence over everything else and seems to imply that the end justifies any means. Pfeiffer discusses the views of various scholars, ministers, and critics, while at the same time discussing Grey's own attitude toward organized religion – the selfish concern for one's own well-being, the grasping for power of leaders, the lack of concern for others. In both books, Grey introduces characters who are concerned with the existence of God, and the equally important, maybe the *more* important, question of What is God Like?

The reader is strongly encouraged to read Pfeiffer's in-depth comments on the above subjects in pages 243 through 253 of Pfeiffer's 2005 absolutely "must-have" book for any Zane Grey reader and fan. The book is available from The Zane Grey's West Society.

(345) Grey's wholehearted, unwavering commitment to what he believed was his mission in writing began well before his writing of **ROTPS**. Pfeiffer says that this commitment revealed a destiny and a conviction of the greatness of the task entrusted to him.

(415) In **ROTPS** Grey utilizes a female as the dominant narrator, providing evidence that he was not anti-feminist, but also clearly indicating that he had no qualms about making a woman the main character.

(448) There is no doubt that Grey's characters were very real to him. On his way to Rainbow Bridge in 1913, he spent a night in Betatakin Canyon – the Surprise Valley of **ROTPS**. He wrote of that visit very descriptive terms of the characters Bess, Venters, and Fay Larkin, commenting: "My dream people of romance had really lived there once upon a time."

(464) Some of Grey's cowboy gunmen are considered to be closer to being gunmen than cowboys, such as Lassiter in **ROTPS**.

(471) Lassiter in **ROTPS** is a lone figure who rides into Cottonwoods into a strange and complicated situation where Mormons are siding with outlaws, and Mormon is pitted against Gentile.

(477) Lassiter's role is to rescue the fair damsel in distress, but he looks more like a herald of doom. He wears "black leather" and wears two black-butted guns (evidently in black holsters for they were "hard to see....agin them black chaps"). He also wore a black sombrero.

(523, 526) Not all of Grey's heroines are genteel, innocent, and helpless. The blind rage of a devout Mormon woman disillusioned by her spiritual advisors is apparent in Jane Withersteen, "...as she rushed to the silence and seclusion of her room, and there could not longer hold back the bursting of her wrath. She went stone-blind in the fury of a passion that had never before showed its power. Lying upon her bed, sightless, voiceless, she was a writhing, living flame. And she tossed there while her fury burned, and finally burned itself out."

(557) Dr. Jane Tompkins (Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Western*, Oxford University Press, 1992) states that Grey was so inhibited by Victorian beliefs of his day that he dared not to have sexual feelings expressed by his characters. By way of compensation, he consciously, or unconsciously, wrote sexual implications into common objects of everyday use in the West, into events, and into the landscape. Thus, a gun becomes a symbol of the penis, the fall of Balancing Rock of sexual intercourse, and a “deep cove” a vagina.

(562) In **ROTPS** Grey further emphasizes the use of sexual wares where a natural, although unpracticed Jane flirts to influence Lassiter and win his love, but she becomes more passionate as her fortunes diminish. She is no longer a cool, aloof goddess, playing at love but a person of mixed emotions and deep passion: “She clung the closer to him, and leaned her panting breast on him, and lifted her face to his. ‘Lassiter, I do love you! It’s leaped out of my agony. It comes suddenly with a terrible blow of truth....Some wonderful change came to me when you buckled on these guns and showed that gray, awful face. I loved you then....Oh, listen and believe – I have nothing, but I’m a woman – a beautiful woman, Lassiter – a passionate, loving woman – and I love you! Take me – hide me in some wild place – and love me and mend my broken heart.’”

(581) The unwavering chastity bestowed upon Grey’s heroines by the critics, is not so unwavering in his writings. In at least nine of his romances the virginity of his heroines is up for barter. Moreover, this does not represent a phase of a particular period of time in Grey’s thinking, but it begins with his second major Western, **ROTPS**, and ends with his last, *Western Union*.

(600-601) In **ROTPS** the hero and heroine leave the West.

Thomas H. Pauly, *ZANE GREY His Life, His Adventures, His Women*, University of Illinois Press, 2005 (ISBN 0-252-03044-3)

References (84, 99, 104-11, 128)

(84) On one of his trips to the Grand Canyon in the region of Tapeats Creek, Grey launched a large boulder that rolled down the incline, creating in his mind an image that would later inspire the famous ending to **ROTPS** in which Lassiter topples a precariously balanced boulder that seals himself, Jane Withersteen, and Young Fay in the story’s valley hideaway. Grey had written Dolly about having rolled the boulder, and he told her he would someday take her to see the valley where it occurred.

(99) Grey’s competing attractions to family and to other women would profoundly influence him in writing **ROTPS**.

(104-111) Pfeiffer discusses how his experiences in the landscape around the Natural Bridge inspired him to write **ROTPS**, and how Grey was inspired to so eloquently describe the area's natural landscape. Readers beginning to read **ROTPS** are encouraged to read Pfeiffer's brief synopsis contained on pages 104 through 111.

(128) In his paper "Nonnezoshe" Grey explains how on his visit to Surprise Valley just beyond Betatakin he "climbed high upon the huge stones, and along the smooth red walls where Fay Larkin once had glided." As a result of this additional visit, Grey conceived of *Rainbow Trail* as a sequel exploring what became of Fay after Lassiter closed the access and sealed himself, Jane and Fay in Surprise Valley.

Frank Gruber, Zane Grey: A Biography, (Amereon Ltd., First Edition – September 1, 1969) (ISBN 0891907564)

References (89-96, 98-99, 107-108, 115, 117-118, 119-120, 122, 129-131)

(89-96) In **ROTPS** Grey attacked the institution of polygamy and the blind faith in certain tenants of the church that had caused much of the trouble in the early frontier days. But there were good Mormons in the book as well as "bad". The heroine herself was a Mormon and did not lose her faith. She rebelled only against certain individual Mormons, who she believed had overstepped and distorted the principles of her religion. Some readers of **ROTPS** thought that the book was a general attack on the Mormon Church itself, and they were afraid that it would offend the Mormon people.

Readers of **ROTPS** are encouraged to read Dr. Gruber's excellent analysis and commentary on pages 86 through 96 of his 1969 book, as it contains discussion of the conditions existing at the time in the Cottonwoods community, as well as many of the Mormon customs with which the author personally disagreed. Dr. Gruber examines the relationships between the characters in the novel as well as some of the most memorable scenes from the book, such as the Venters-Card horse race, the poignant scene where Jane Withersteen educates Lassiter about the history between her family and the Mormon Church and Milly Erne, education that finally answers the original questions that prompted Lassiter to begin his search for Milly.

(98-99) Gruber discusses the problems between Grey and his publishers, despite which **ROTPS** eventually became the number one seller of all Grey's books. Gruber discusses the impact upon Grey and his wife Dolly and the subsequent steps they took to overcome initial displeasures with the novel and move on to future Grey successes.

(107-108) Gruber discusses the importance of Owen Wister's 1902 novel *The Virginian* in opening the door to what would become the popular genre of romantic Western literature, preparing an audience of readers for Grey's early novels.

(115) The revolution in Mexico and the man of the people, Francisco (Pancho) Villa provided the background for Grey furnishing a modern theme in 1912-1913 for his novel *Desert Gold*, in which Grey revealed his fascination for the arid wastes, as well as his liking for Indians.

(117-118) The momentum from **ROTPS** greatly boosted the interest in Grey's future works, allowing him to open the new region of New Mexico for his future novel *The Light of Western Stars*.

(119-120) The popularity of **ROTPS** and *Heritage of the Desert* was the factor that caused Grey's wife Dolly to encourage him to make further trips to renew and add to his knowledge of the West. It was through those trips that Grey met personalities, such as Al Doyle, the Wetherill brothers, John Wetherill's wife, and the Paiute Indian Nas ta Bega. It was on those trips that Grey visited locations that would eventually become the landscape settings for his novels, places like Kayenta, Nonnezosche, Monument Valley, and Flagstaff. Those places would also become the locations where Grey would insist that movies made from his books would be filmed.

(122) Grey's love of horses dated back to his first Western trip in 1907. Buffalo Jones's troupe included several wild-horse hunters who shared stories of their adventures and way of life with the author. Grey would go on to create three memorable horses in *Black Star*, *Night*, and *Wrangle*, horses that in future novels would overshadow the human characters in importance.

(129-131) It was 1919 when Grey was first approached by a film maker, motion-picture mogul William K. Fox, with an interest in obtaining the film rights to **ROTPS**. On pages 129 through 131 Gruber discusses the history of Grey's relationships with film-makers after his first venture in 1919, an excellent synopsis of those film-making years.

Arthur G. Kimball, *ACE OF HEARTS the Westerns of ZANE GREY*, (Texas Christian University Press – 1993) (ISBN 0-87565-121-6)

References (32, 46, 75, 103-105, 134-140, 150, 200-202)

(32) Grey features the gun's erotic potential in **ROTPS**.

(46) In **ROTPS** the beautiful heroine has long turned to her Utah hills in good times and bad. The opening of the novel finds her at one of the worst; Elder Tull, an evil Mormon, confronts Jane along with a band of men, and threatens to whip her friend Venters. Lassiter, wearing black leather, rides in just in time to thwart Tull and be Jane's champion. The "shape" bestowed by the sage slopes proves to be a tough and handsome gunman, her future lover. This mélange of interactions between landscape and character constitutes a shaping, of course. Environment inevitably exerts a shaping force in Grey's novels.

(75) In **ROTPS**, the heroine Jane Withersteen, wants the hero, Lassiter, to give up his guns, ostensibly to keep him from killing more men, to save him “from more wickedness – more wanton bloodshed.” This is one of the scenes in Grey’s novels where the author seemingly re-channels the interest from sex to violence, where scenes feature a gun, a woman’s “campaign” against killing, and heavy eroticism.

(103-105) On these pages, Dr. Kimball discusses in detail, with attention to symbolism, how Grey utilizes eroticism, in an almost “teasing” manner of presentation, but there is almost no overt consummation....where arousal and postponement may provide more erotic titillation than outright consummation. In **ROTPS** the Jane Lassiter plot is heavily erotic; so is that with Bess and Venters. The narrative develops sexual interest from the opening page, where Mormon sexual repression, in general, and Tull’s jealousy of Venters in particular, set the scene. It continues through Jane’s “hungering” when Lassiter rides up, through her preoccupation with his big black guns....Grey uses techniques that become his staple sources of erotic appeal: suggestive metaphor, scenes of passion and kisses, the ripped blouses and exposed breast, Lassiter’s heavy black guns, and the secretive allure of Surprise Valley. There’s an abduction too – of Little Fay – Grey’s favorite device, though without much erotic appeal in this case except indirectly as part of the hovering Mormon threat.

(134-140) On pages 134 through 140 of his 1993 book, Dr. Kimball discusses lawlessness, especially as it applies to the differences between what is considered Mormon law and what Lassiter describes as “woman’s law” when confronted with an affront from a man in the West, and other general concepts of law, such as God’s law, revenge law, and the concept of “laying down the law” by law enforcement and judicial means. These pages are also an excellent synopsis, of sorts, from the opening scene of the novel through every segment where law and redemption are in conflict or in question.

(150) Grey adds another definition of what constitutes an “outlaw” in **ROTPS** as he, in Dr. Kimball’s words, “pulls out all the stops, and Bishop Dyer smacks of the villains of gothic melodrama.” Grey’s Mormons here are lecherous, murderous tyrants.

(200-202) Grey often utilizes the concept of an idyllic Eden, and in **ROTPS** Jane Withersteen quits on Eden for another, the wealthy Mormon ranch estate inherited from her tainted father for the isolated Surprise Valley; paradise regained, but only via a rejection of “civilized” society which, embodied in the Mormon villains, proves intolerable.

Dr. Carlton Jackson, ZANE GREY: Revised Edition, Published by Twayne's United States Authors Series Edited by Kenneth Eble, University of Omaha, 1989 (ISBN 0-8057-7543-9)

References (21, 35-40, 76, 94, 127)

(21) Grey utilizes the theme of the personal and institutional changes wrought by lawlessness days in the West. In his treatment of changing Mormonism, Grey put the stamp of historical research on his novels, and he contributed to an understanding of that period in American history.

(35-40) The reader is encouraged to read Dr. Jackson's excellent synopsis and analysis of **ROTPS** on pages 35 through 40 of his 1989 book. He examines both the conflict between the main characters and the Mormon Church, as well as love between one man and one woman as the noblest function of mankind as the two interwoven plots in what he calls Grey's most popular romantic Western novel.

(76, 94) In **ROTPS** Grey shows the significance of the gunman to western development. Next to his six-shooter, the gunman depended most for his well-being on his horse. The Western gunman is the strongest drawn character in all the Zane Grey novels, characters like Lassiter in **ROTPS**.

(127) On the charge that he created unbelievable characters, Grey said that he had known a hundred cowboys like Venters and dozens of Western women who were as "sweet and innocent and ignorant of life" as Bess Erne, both characters in **ROTPS**.

Victor Carl Friesen, ZANE GREY'S WILD WEST, A Study of 31 Novels, (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014) (ISBN 978-0-7864-7779-1)

References (18-24)

(18-24) Readers are encouraged to read pages 18 through 24 of Dr. Friesen's 2014 book which contains a comprehensive synopsis of **ROTPS** with scholarly interpretations and insight. It may be the very best of the 31 well-written synopses in this book, which is befitting as **ROTPS** is the largest selling of all Zane Grey novels, a novel thought by many scholars to be the writer's finest work. Dr. Friesen's 2014 book is a "must-have" reference book which should be a part of the library of every Zane Grey reader and fan.

(46-47) Pages 46 through 47 provide Dr. Friesen's analysis of Grey's sequel 1915 novel *The Rainbow Trail*. Readers are encouraged to read pages 46 through 47 before beginning to read the sequel or before beginning to read *The Desert Crucible*, the 2003 republication of *The Rainbow Trail* without the publisher's censoring to the author's original manuscript.