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FEBRUARY
1991

Redd Boggs' SPROCKET

GREY AREA

The time had come for Venters and Bess to leave their retreat. They were at great pains to choose the few things they would be able to carry with them on the journey out of Utah.

"Bern, whatever kind of a pack's this, anyhow?" questioned Bess, rising from her work with reddened face.

Venters, absorbed in his own task, did not look up at all, and in reply said he had brought so much from Cottonwoods that he did not recollect the half of it.

"A woman packed this!" Bess exclaimed.

-- Riders of the Purple Sage (Chapter 21) by Zane Grey

"Who wrote Zane Grey's novels?" Gretchen asked me one evening.

Once I had collected my thoughts, since I was reading something far removed from Zane Grey, I replied in the same words that Wrai Ballard used when I asked the same question (but didn't answer it) in my SAPS fanzine some years later. "I believe Zane Grey wrote Zane Grey's novels," I said shortly, trying to return to my book. Then curiosity prompted me to look up and try to discover what had inspired the question. I saw she was reading the biography of Zane Grey by Frank Gruber (1970), which I had bought a few days earlier but had not yet looked at. That she was reading the book did not surprise me in the least, for she was capable of reading almost anything that came to hand. But the question did startle me. I hadn't given the matter any thought before. "Well," I said impatiently, "you don't seem to believe me. What is the answer? Who *did* write Zane Grey's books?"

"Mrs Zane Grey, of course," she said, as if it was the most reasonable answer in the world. She displayed a picture in the book which shows "Mrs Zane Grey in Z. G.'s studio (1955)," according to the caption. "Doesn't she look awfully comfortable in that chair?" Gretchen asked. I studied the photo of Mrs Grey sitting in an easy chair with a large writing board across her lap. She has paper and pen before her, and in the background are shelves of books (titles unreadable, alas).

"Zane Grey died in 1939 and wasn't around to object to her sitting in his writing chair, supposing that he would've anyway," I said. "That proves nothing." But of course Gretchen had other evidence indicating that Mrs Zane Grey wrote her husband's novels. For example, in what was said by Gruber to be Grey's "biggest writing year" (1925), he was sailing in his schooner to the Galapagos islands, and later, in December of that year, to New Zealand. Yet during that year he sold numerous articles, and had at least four stories running in the slicks. He made $575,000 in 1925, a substantial amount for those times. In 1928 and 1929, he was fishing at Tahiti, she pointed out, but found time to write no fewer than six full-length serials for *Collier's*, *Country Gentleman*, and other magazines, "plus shorter serials for high pay." "When did he have time to write all that stuff?" Gretchen wondered.

"What else is there to do on board a ship?" I said. "Dullest place in the world. Asimov wrote a lot when he sailed to England on an ocean liner. Opus #360 to #393, if I remember rightly."

"Furthermore," she went on relentlessly with the soft momentum of a spring snowstorm, "Gruber admits that besides doing research for Grey and 'working on his manuscripts,' at the same time taking care of their big house in Altadena, Mrs Grey took a course in novel writing (this was in 1925) and later a course in short-story writing. This went on for two years." Finally, Gretchen pointed out, "Zane Grey died in 1939, but his books continued to appear regularly, year by year, from Harper's, at least till 1963, when the record stops, at least in this edition of Gruber's biography. Where did all that material come from?"

"He was the cowboy Isaac Asimov," I said. "He wrote so prolifically that they had all those extra manuscripts on hand when he died, and rationed them out over the next quarter century." I was not convinced at first. A macho fellow like Zane Grey, writing macho fiction, allowing his wife to write his stuff while he fished at Tahiti? But I had to admit that wives do incredible things to help their husbands. Never underestimate a woman. "Virginia wrote some of Jim Blish's stories -- he later gave her credit," I said, thinking aloud. "That may happen more commonly that is ever revealed."

"Yes, there's even the case of John Stuart Mill," Gretchen said darkly, "and it's just the tip of the iceberg. Tell me something I don't know." She returned to her reading. "Believe me, Mrs Zane Grey wrote Zane Grey's stories."

Thinking about it later, I realized that Gretchen was probably -- partly -- right. I don't discount female intuition, especially hers. I remembered that, even as a kid, when I read all of Zane Grey's stuff that I could lay hands to, I was a little puzzled by one aspect of his stories. He had lots of important female characters, and some of his books (though far from all) are told in whole or part from the viewpoint of a female character. That seemed odd to me. You would think Zane Grey's novels would be as unremittingly macho as a beer commercial. It wasn't the way of most western novels. Even in the stories of Ernest Haycox the woman is present only as part of the hero's reward, along with the clearing of his name and the ranch he falls heir to, that ends the story. She is very desirable, but only a pretty bauble, a woman seen from a male viewpoint. Women sometimes do not like other women, but (oddly enough) they always believe that they are human beings.

Riders of the Purple Sage (1912) is in large part the story of Jane Withersteen, the owner of a ranch in the Mormon village of Cottonwoods on the Utah frontier, and that part of the novel is told from her viewpoint. The heroic figure of Lassiter, the black-garbed two-gun man, who thrilled me when I first read of him, much as gray-clad Kimball Kinnison did a few years later, is seen through Jane's eyes. An even better example is found in one of Grey's best novels: *Wildfire* (1917) The spirited girl Lucy Bostil is one of the central characters and by far the most interesting character in the book. "Lucy's hair was a bright stream of gold in

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SPIROCHETE : Number 55 : February 1991. Edited and published at the Sign of the Idle Gestetner by Redd Boggs, P. O. Box 1111, Berkeley, California 94701, for the two-hundred-fourteenth mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press association. "The parent who could see his boy as he really is would shake his head and say, 'Willy is no good; I'll sell him.'" -- Stephen Leacock. The Spirochete heading is by Gretchen Schwenn, done for the first issue, 19 November 1964. THE GAFIA PRESS.

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the wind. She rode bareback. It seemed that she was hunched low over Buckles with her knees high on his back -- scarcely astride him at all. Yet her motion was one with the horse...." I fell in love with Lucy when I first read the book at the age of nine or ten.

But the story that persuaded me most powerfully to Gretchen's theory is *Under the Tonto Rim*, an Arizona idyl which I find almost as pleasant and almost as lovely in the mists of nostalgia as Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The lead character in the book is another Lucy, Lucy Watson, but even more convincing than Grey's choice of a protagonist is the fact that there is little violence in this novel, even though the back cover of the paperback features the one such scene in the story ("'I'm a-gonna bore you,' panted Middleton... Suddenly there was a burst of gunfire!") The scene actually takes place as far offstage as any such scene in western fiction. Eschewing violence in favor of rosy romance is surely a very feminine trait in story-telling. But a western without violence? It's like a Restoration comedy without a seduction scene. Finally: the novel, under the title "The Bee Hunter," appeared in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1925, which was Grey's "biggest writing year," and the year that Mrs Grey was taking a novel-writing class.

Not all of Zane Grey's stories are bereft of violence of course. *Riders of the Purple Sage* and others of his novels have gunfights with plenty of gore. *The Lost Wagon Train* (1936) describes a particularly sanguinary massacre committed by Indians and renegades, and at least one novel, *The Trail Driver* (1936), ends in a blood bath, killing off many of the characters in the story, a scene that I found shockingly gratuitous when I read the story as a kid. I think Grey wrote some of his books himself: all of his non-fiction books about hunting and fishing *(Roping Lions in the Grand Canyon; Tales of Swordfish and Tuna)*; his books for boys *(The Young Pitcher; Ken Ward in the Jungle)*; and the sections of his novels that describe manly action and endeavors. A woman of course is capable of writing these things, but is unlikely to have done so, especially when more romantic works like *The Light of Western Stars* and *The Desert of Wheat* were equally successful. But I think also that many of his books, including *Riders of the Purple Sage* and *Wildfire*, were collaborations with Mrs Grey, who did the Lee Hawkins Garby bit, far more voluminously and more successfully than that almost forgotten lady. I don't know how many novels, or parts of novels, she may have written, but they were numerous, and the books included some of Zane Grey's most famous and most popular best-sellers. *Under the Tonto Rim*, for one, was entirely the product of the mind and imagination of Mrs Zane Grey. Like the bundle of supplies that Bess found in Venters' possession, those many stories betray the touch of a woman's hand.

THE CAPTURED CROSS-SECTION

AVRAM DAVIDSON [901 Pleasant avenue #2, Bremerton WA 98310]

[On 'Yucatan But I Just Burn and Peel," Spirochete #53] Well, "my" Mexico is also the central plateau, and I lived in the lower right lobe of the Estate of Mexico once for nine months and once for four or five. Wrote rather well and edited F&SF there. Lost an unborn child there. I always thought to go back, too, either there or to the adjacent Estate of Morelos in Cuautla, the winter capital of Montezuma, where the market has bees instead of flies. "Just as soon as I get some steady income, small but steady." On April 20 1988 I had a heart attack; on the 23rd I turned 65 and became eligible for Social Security; on c. the 28th I had the first of four rather disabling strokes. As my friend Alan E. Nourse M. D. said to me, "If you go to live in any part of Mexico you will be dead in three months."

But I was also in Merida -- twice. Twenty-seven and twenty-five years ago. It was magnifico and gave the impression that the last changes had been made under Maximiliano -- this is probably too early: Diaz, then. The front of the cathedral (sign: "LADY DO NOT WEAR THE IMODEST DRES IN CATEDRAL") was like like that of any Hispano cathedral of the 16th or 17th century, but the big brown stones of the back

(so different from the black stones of the back of the cathedral in the City of Mexico) left no doubt that they had been set in place by the same masons who built the other old Yucatan buildings in Merida.

And O my Lord and Savior was it ever hot! Hot HOT! In January. Imagine it at Carnival time of my later visit. My feeling: Merida has everything Mexico (City) has that one wants, and how delightfully smaller, too! Oh, many rich-looking blanco y Mestizo men in Fancy Expensive Guayabanas. I care naught for the dead Mayas, but lovely Merida was full of lovely living Mayas, smiling, smiling, the only happy-looking Indians I ever saw in Mexico — all in white, the men in the pajama-like algodones, the women in huipil, with neck-yoke in colored embroidery -- walking hand-in-hand. No one else in the Mexican republic walked hand-in-hand. Some handsome streets with villas and iron-work, a la France's, from the days of the sisal boom, great and splendid varieties of food at any sidewalk stand. I ate venado (venison) across from my Gran Hotel, like the palacio of a late Renascence baron or duque. Here I set the mattress on fire, another story. Here I bought two pieces of Spanish silver-gilt work, a fish with glittering movable scales, a ship with glittering movable sails, and I gave them to my lovely lady who, still lovely though no longer my lady, died in a crash on the highway between Forest Knolls and Lagunitas, is it already 17 years ago? All dreams are fragile, but some of them stay with us longer than others, even the shards. Luego, amigo mio.

HARLAN ELLISON [Sherman Oaks CA]

Re: Spirochete #54, pp 3/4, pars. 6/1: Oiy gawd! You found me out! I'd thought I had managed to disguise the anomie, but...obviously not. Now I understand why Hitler tried so hard to knock you off. That damnable insight. But in truth (though they do look a lot alike, and both have the same reek), it was more dismay than boredom. A sense of trying to pull water from a dry well; the well being The World in General. What I think it is, Redd, is that even I — cranky to a degree that has been called High Art of Animosity -- have reached a level of weariness at how dreary the world has become. It may be that I've just lived too long. Things like Milkin and Milli Vanilli would not have existed in the world of the '40s; or if they did, there would have been outrage. All best otherwise.

RUTH BERMAN [2809 Drew avenue South, Minneapolis MN 55416]

I see in John Boardman's Dagon that you rank me with Ignatius Donnelly among Minnesotans. Thanks -- that's a kindly sort of thought! Your list of Weird People in Spirochete #54 is certainly a variegated one. One of the Weird recollections you mention I share. Or rather, I don't think I've seen Karen Anderson describe turning into a Countess Dracula, but I saw her do it at ... I forget which convention's costume ball, but I think it was a later one. The version I remember was a duo act, with Karen spreading out her batwings and biting Astrid, drawing away to leave blood running down Astrid's neck, whereupon Astrid opened her mouth to reveal her new-grown fangs. An impressive act.

I took along Spirochete #54 when I went to talk to some high school students recently. It seems there's a sort of College Quiz Bowl game (except that they call it a Decathlon, and it covers a limited field of ten topics, with assigned readings in the topics the kids can study for, with the topics changing from year to year, instead of covering all General Knowledge) that a lot of high schools take part in. My niece Margit is on her school's team, and when she found out one of the topics was sf, she asked if I'd come to talk to them about sf. Eleanor Arnason and Eric Heidemann came along, too. One of the assigned readings was Heinlein's "Universe," so I read your comments about "The Roads Must Roll" by way of getting the talk started. It seemed rather a quirky list of readings, both in terms of authors and in terms of the works chosen: the others were Asimov's "The Martian Way," Walter M. Miller's "Crucifixus Etiam," Delaney's Nova, and LeGuin's "Vaster Than Empires." I was surprised in rereading "The Martian Way" to see how much a Heinlein story it is, more so than Asimov is in most of his writing. In fact, it's so much a Heinlein story that I could have sworn it was plagiarized from The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, except that it came out about ten years earlier.

EC: Karen says the later version of Countess Dracula ("The Bat and the Bitten") was a stage presentation at Westercon '69 and the St Louis Worldcon the same year.

I like science fiction so much I don't like much science fictiion.
