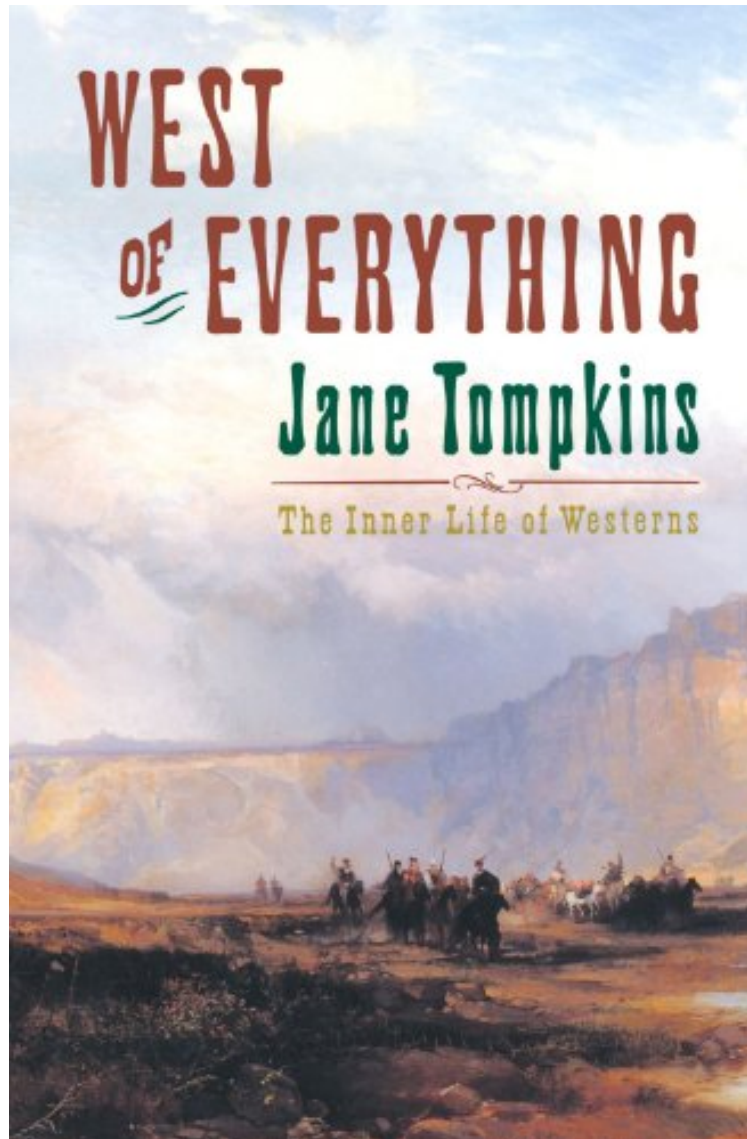


(Download) West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (Oxford Paperbacks)

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Jane Tompkins

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**Jane Tompkins : West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (Oxford Paperbacks)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (Oxford Paperbacks):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An enjoyable, REVELATORY tribute to old fashioned cinema westerns. By Pizzaro This is one of those rare books that combines sharp analysis, penetrating observations and

absolutely delightful armchair reading, with plenty of specific examples from old fashioned westerns to reveal the assumptions they all share. The book is organized around themes (see the Table of Contents in the "Look Inside This Book" feature for these). Surprising BUT TRUE observations abound: the men we see in westerns have a low opinion of women, of embroidered language, of the graces of parlours, dancing --- in short, of civilization itself --- and she presents westerns as a counterreaction to the spread of industrialization, regimentation and the rise of petticoats and female gentility all over America. But the main focus is on the perennial nature of the cowboy, his narrow personality, his love of pain and hardship, his desperate need to strip away the fripperies of social intercourse and get down to the basics of courage and honour. Well chosen examples abound, taken from movies we've all enjoyed. Lots of constant features have a new, clearer definition for us. She calls to our attention the very few buildings needed to characterize every single western town we've ever seen on the screen: the hotel, the livery stable, saloon, sheriff's office, church, barber shop, general store --- AND THAT'S THE LOT! These are the only town buildings identified in 95% of westerns. The remainder of the buildings remain on view but expendable. And she lists the unexamined assumptions basic to our enjoyment of westerns, i.e., that somehow we've come to assume it's normal for men to gun each other down in the dusty streets of desert towns, with excited townspeople holding their breath and eager to run out and jabber about it all in a great surge of relief and approval. And she points out how men are presented as superior, often shown looking down from the saddle at the anxious woman in homespun. But Jane Tompkins loves it all. "I too would love to swagger into a saloon, order a whiskey, spin around and hear all conversation stop." This is a delightful, positive, tribute to the westerns (roughly up to the 1980s) that have entered our consciousness and built a landscape there. And it's all easy, non-didactic reading. There's no deconstruction here, other than a few sentences about the fate of the Indians. (The last word goes with the era presented by the book). There's no attempt to present historical facts that are unsettling in the mode of "what your schools never told you about the expansion of the west." Instead, Jane Tompkins confines herself to the cinema world of cowboys, gunslingers, saloon insults, strangers riding into town, bush whackings and the final shootout on Main Street with all the onlookers peering breathlessly from the corners of windows. Her book stays within its announced intentions and IMHO can't be improved upon. It reigns supreme. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Laura Loved this 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. ?By Elise Artelt More conjecture, but interesting and well-done. She offers an interesting slant on the easterners that went west.

A leading figure in the debate over the literary canon, Jane Tompkins was one of the first to point to the ongoing relevance of popular women's fiction in the 19th century, long overlooked or scorned by literary critics. Now, in *West of Everything*, Tompkins shows how popular novels and films of the American west have shaped the emotional lives of people in our time. Into this world full of violence and manly courage, the world of John Wayne and Louis L'Amour, Tompkins takes her readers, letting them feel what the hero feels, endure what he endures. Writing with sympathy, insight, and respect, she probes the main elements of the Western--its preoccupation with death, its barren landscapes, galloping horses, hard-bitten men and marginalized women--revealing the view of reality and code of behavior these features contain. She considers the Western hero's attraction to pain, his fear of women and language, his desire to dominate the environment--and to merge with it. In fact, Tompkins argues, for better or worse Westerns have taught us all--men especially--how to behave. It was as a reaction against popular women's novels and women's invasion of the public sphere that Westerns originated, Tompkins maintains. With Westerns, men were reclaiming cultural territory, countering the inwardness, spirituality, and domesticity of the sentimental writers, with a rough and tumble, secular, man-centered world. Tompkins brings these insights to bear in considering film classics such as *Red River* and *Lone Star*, and novels such as Louis L'Amour's *Last of the Breed* and Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. In one of the most moving chapters (chosen for *Best American Essays* of 1991), Tompkins shows how the life of Buffalo Bill Cody, killer of Native Americans and charismatic star of the Wild West show, evokes the contradictory feelings which the Western typically elicits--horror and fascination with violence, but also love and respect for the romantic ideal of the cowboy. Whether interpreting a photograph of John Wayne meditating on the slaughter of cattle, Jane Tompkins writes with humor, compassion, and a provocative intellect. Her book will appeal to many Americans who read or watch Westerns, and to all those interested in a serious approach to popular culture.

From *Library Journal* In her first book, *Sensational Designs* (Oxford Univ. Pr., 1985), Tompkins argues that serious study of the sentimental novels America produced in the 19th century offers rewards. The next major genre to make an appearance in popular American fiction was the Western. Here, Tompkins examines the Western as it appears in print and on film. She discusses *The Virginian*, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, and Louis L'Amour's *Last of the Breed* at some length and gives a detailed description of her visit to the Buffalo Bill Museum. Other parts of her book range farther afield. Tompkins attempts to forge a *Weltanschauung* of the Western, which of course leads to an occasional overgeneralization, but her personalized intellectual response to the genre makes this book interesting and thought-provoking. - John Smothers, Monmouth Cty. Lib., Manalapan, N.J. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Kirkus* "...the bodies of the silent men of Company C lay wide-eyed to the rain and bare-chested to the

wind...dead now in the long grass on a lonely hill, west of everything." So ends a paragraph of Louis L'Amour's *Hondo*, a work that readers of Tompkins's rapt reevaluation of the ecstasies of Western novels, film, and icons will come to revere as much as does Tompkins herself (English/Duke Univ.). The two heroes who loom largest in Tompkins's pantheon are L'Amour and Zane Grey. She quotes brilliantly, offering the reader time and again "the fully saturated moment," showing a Grey who is a poet with as furiously rich and sexually Pan-spirited a sense of landscape as D.H. Lawrence. Tompkins sees the Western as a cannon-burst against sentimental women's fiction in the 19th century, against the dominance of women's culture and the women's invasion of the public sphere between 1880 and 1920. "It's about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents." Her larger themes are death, women, the language of men ("yup"), landscape, horses, and cattle--all of which she follows in John Wayne classics, *The Searchers* and *Red River*, as well as in Alan Ladd's *Shane*. But her richest chapters are those on Grey, who "doesn't know that he is making the rim rock and the sage slopes enact the birth of a new age, but that is what he is doing." His is a landscape with blatant but unacknowledged sexual imagery, as in *Riders of the Purple Sage*: "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." Some academic clinkers, but mainly right down to sod. (Ten halftones--not seen.) -- Copyright 1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "The feminist perspective of *West of Everything* makes it invaluable to the ongoing critical discourse on Westerns."--The San Francisco Chronicle "Jane Tompkins knows her Western through and through; she handles details, events and scenes from novels and movies with skill and surety....She brings spirit, energy, freshness and originality to a field of study that has long been buried many feet deep in cliches."--Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Boston Sunday Globe* "A passionate and generous book."--*Newsday* "Interesting and thought-provoking."--*Library Journal* "In explaining how she overcame her prejudices against the Western Tompkins illuminates the genre as few others ever have."--Hubert I. Cohen, University of Michigan "A daring and confrontational literary essay meant to rattle the peace of mind of just about every cowboy on the face of the earth....Throughout her book [Tompkins] evidences a charm, honesty, and sense of intellectual adventure that would make her a happy partner on a long ride....And why do I love Miz Tompkins so much for bush-whacking the myth of the West inside me? Because she's right."--John Calvin Batchelor, *Washington Post Book World* "Anyone who cares about American popular culture could profit from reading this masterpiece."--*Booklist* "We've long recognized that the western is a basic myth of masculinity. Thus, it's not surprising that a woman scholar might have, if not the last word, at least a good deal to say about the genre. What's even more striking is that Jane Tompkins in *West of Everything* not only develops an insightful feminist critique of the western as macho mythos, but also has some brilliant observations to make about the genre's compelling artistic and cultural force. This is not simply gender criticism, but cultural and aesthetic analysis at its most fascinating."--John G. Cawelti, University of Kentucky "Treating both Western novels and Western movies, Jane Tompkins argues that there is nothing trivial about the desires they arouse or the violence they persuade us to applaud. By the end of her study, she forces us to confront that righteous ecstasy through which, for one brief moment, we all share in the murderous discharge of tension which traditionally concludes the Western. It is a chilling and provocative Epilogue to a book that movingly demonstrates why this famous feminist critic has always found herself both attracted to and repelled by the power of cowboy heroes. In short, embracing and sobering analysis."--Annette Kolodny, author of *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her* "[A] captivating, witty study....A great read. One comes away hard-pressed to imagine any writer topping Tompkin's feat of integrating the western and the way Americans think."--*Denver Post*