



The Sea Of Grass

Conrad Richter

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Published in 1936, this novel presents in epic scope the conflicts in the settling of the American Southwest. Set in New Mexico in the late 19th century, The Sea of Grass concerns the often violent clashes between the pioneering ranchers, whose cattle range freely through the vast sea of grass, and the farmers, or "nesters," who build fences and turn the sod. Against this background is set the triangle of rancher Colonel Jim Brewton, his unstable Eastern wife Lutie, and the ambitious Brice Chamberlain. Richter casts the story in Homeric terms, with the children caught up in the conflicts of their parents.

The Sea Of Grass Details

Date : Published July 1st 1992 by Ohio University Press (first published 1936)

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Author : Conrad Richter

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From Reader Review The Sea Of Grass for online ebook

Julie says

I read this book in one day--probably 4 hours. It was great. Highly recommended.

This is the best review I could find:

<http://saddlebums.blogspot.com/2007/1...>

Jake says

This was required reading in a Literary Genre class I took about novels. I'll keep this short since I can't say the novel had a big impact on me. However, the themes and characters are classical as billed. I love the energy and romanticism of frontier stories and the gritty determination of frontier characters. The only fault I could really find in this novel is I didn't find it memorable. And that isn't much of a fault in the context of a well-crafted story. A novel doesn't have to wind up a favorite to have been worth reading.

El says

I read this in a day over the weekend and then plum forgot to even log it here. I suppose it's because it was such a short book, but unfortunately I think it's really because I just put it out of my mind that quickly.

I'm normally all about early American fiction, even of the Southwestern variety, but this one barely made an impression on me. It's the story of Colonel Jim Brewton, his wife Lutie and another man, and of course there's a bit of a triangle. The writing isn't horrible, but it's like the trouble I had with Richter's *The Light in the Forest*. It felt drier than it needed to be (the writing I mean) and because of its length I felt it breezed by too quickly. Or too easily. Or something. Maybe Richter and I just plain do not jive.

Cathy says

Sea of Grass seems, if anything, better than I remembered from my first reading of probably 40 years ago. And the historical setting was much more meaningful having just read Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*.

Nancy says

This was a rather unusual book. It is short and a quick read. It is told from the point of view of a character who is not one of the main characters. This means he doesn't always know everything that takes place or why characters do the things they do. I found that a bit unsatisfactory. It is sort of a western set in New Mexico in

the 1800s when the land was being homesteaded. It deals with the conflict between ranchers and homesteaders. There are some very larger-than-life characters and I enjoyed the book.

Susan says

For a small book, this packs a pretty big punch. The characters are drawn almost larger than life, and the tensions -- between various individuals, as well as between ranchers and "nesters" -- make this an intense story first of all, though it also paints a vivid picture of a past time on the plains of New Mexico.

Alan Marchant says

needs a good mowing

The Sea of Grass is a tour-de-force of artistic prose. Conrad Richter's word painting of New Mexico at the end of the cowboy era is chock full of delightful metaphors and imagery.

The problem is that all that poetic language crowds out the dialog and characterization. So the story of macho Colonel Brewton and his mail-order bride falls as flat as a limp tortilla. The affection and forgiveness that Brewton lavishes on his whorish and supercilious wife is understandable only as a stereotypically proud male devotion. Her idolization by the rest of the town (including the young narrator) is not justified at all.

Read this novella strictly as an interesting period piece, ignoring the plot, and your time will not be wasted.

John Whittemore says

I read this book as an old ratty paperback when I was about 12, but the impression of Colonel Brewton is still strong in my mind.

This powerful man's graceful fall from influence and his relationship with his sons is something I still remember two decades later. It was my first interaction with a character so well written and complex that I believed in him. His struggles and failures mattered to me.

I really should read this book again, but I hesitate wondering if all the "great literature" I have read since then might erase the powerful effect it's memory still has on me.

If you appreciate character-driven stories I recommend this book.

Morgan Plant says

I started this last night when I couldn't sleep and finished it this morning. It is quick but lovely. Conrad Richter wrote it in 1936 and a movie starring Spencer Tracy was made of the story. Now I want to find the

film. Set in New Mexico in early 1900s maybe. I just checked and New Mexico became a state in 1912. Lyrical descriptions of the land, good story (independent woman character included) and great depiction of the tension between the farmer and the cowmen.

Bob says

Great book, many authors would have written this story with many more words, but the author paints a wonderful full picture of the southwest and tells a powerful, heart and spirit moving story, with few words. I have read two of his books now and I will be reading more.

Bettie? says

The lusty pioneer blood is tamed now, broken and gelded like the wild horse and the frontier settlement

I agree with whichever reviewer said that this story needs a mow.

1.5*

Penny says

I had forgotten how much I liked Conrad Richter. This is a short novel, so a quick read. He spins a good tale and writes beautifully. "And when I fell asleep I dreamed that something vaguely beautiful had gone out of this massive ranch house like the kernel of life out of a prairie seed, and all that remained was the brown shell of adobe walls staring from its empty sockets." I think he may have other books I haven't yet read. I will look for them.

George K. says

"Η θ?λασσα του γρασιδιο?", εκδ?σεις Πεχλιβαν?δη.

Ο Κ?νραντ Ρ?χτερ ?χει γρ?ψει δι?φορα ενδιαφ?ροντα και αρκετ? πολυδιαβασμ?να μυθιστορ?ματα, ?πως η τριλογ?α The Awakening Land (που αποτελε?ται απ? τα "The Trees", "The Fields" και "The Town") ? το "The Light in the Forest", αλλ? δυστυχ?ς το "Η θ?λασσα του γρασιδιο?" ε?ναι το μοναδικ? που ?χει μεταφραστε? στα ελληνικ?, απ'?σο γνωρ?ζω. Και λ?ω δυστυχ?ς, γιατ? με β?ση το βιβλιαρ?κι αυτ?, φανεται για ?ναν εξαιρετικ? συγγραφ?α, σ?γουρα πολ? κοντ? στα αναγνωστικ? μου γο?στα.

Ο Ρ?χτερ, μ?σα σε σχετικ? λ?γες σελ?δες, καταφ?ρνει να αποτυπ?σει με ιδια?τερη μαεστρ?α τις συγκρο?σεις των πιον?ρων κτηματι?ν και των καουμπ?ηδων, με τους αγρ?τες-ν?ους απο?κους, που

θέλανε να εγκατασταθουν και να δουλεύουν στις Νοτιοδυτικές περιοχές των Ηνωμένων Πολιτειών -?πως το Ν?ο Μεξικό-, κατ' τα τ?λη του 19ου αι?να. Μια κ?ποια πλοκή υπ?ρχει, ?πως και ορισμ?νοι βασικο? χαρακτη?ρες, ?μως το δυνατ? σημε?ο του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι αν μη τι ?λλο η πραγματικ? υπ?ροχη γραφ?, με τις ?ντονα ρεαλιστικ?ς και σε σημε?α λυρικ?ς περιγραφ?ς τοπ?ων, καταστ?σεων και ανθρ?πων.

Ο συγγραφέας κατ'φερε με χαρακτηριστικ? ?νεση να με μεταφ?ρει π?σω στον χρ?νο και σε ?λλους τ?πους, σκλήρο?ς μα συν?μα μαγευτικο?ς, εν? απ?δειξε ?τι ακ?μα και ?να τ?σο μικρ? βιβλιαρ?κι μπορε? να διαθ?τει ?νταση και να χωρ?σει δυνατ?ς εικ?νες. Το μ?νο σ?γουρο ε?ναι ?τι στο μ?λλον θα διαβ?σω και ?λλα βιβλ?α του συγγραφέα, ε?τε μεταφραστο?ν κ?ποια δικ? του ε?τε ?χι.

Alexis Neal says

In the late 1800s, the Southwestern United States was the domain of the cattle baron. Herds of cattle roamed vast stretches of prairie; plump, like plump, four-legged fish in a sea of grass. That is, until farmers, or 'nesters', from the east swarm the plains, eager to carve up the expanse and try their hands at coaxing crops from the dry soil. With rancher Jim Brewton on one side and ambitious blonde attorney Brice Chamberlain on the other, conflict seems inevitable. When Brewton marries a city girl from back east, the conflict between the two men takes on a new dimension, and future generations will feel the repercussions.

This is not a plot book. I mean, some stuff happens, and there's, like, shootings and hangings and trials and (maybe) infidelity and plenty of shady behavior. But that's not really the point. Really, all that is just an excuse to meditate on the nature of the west and what it is and what it isn't. Oh, and to point out that apparently being a selfish jerk is genetic.

When we first meet attorney Brice Chamberlain, he seems--for a moment--to be a man of the people, a man out for justice and on the side of right. After all, he just wants to see that these farmers have a place to live and raise crops and pursue the American dream. A real hero-type, you know? Except, oh wait--they're in New Mexico, which means there's a legitimate question as to how much crop-raising the land will bear. There's a reason it's a sea of grass and not a sea of shrubs and trees and lush undergrowth. And sure enough, after [SPOILER] the farmers get their way, they get a few unusually wet seasons, produce some actual crops, and then promptly lose it all when the land resumes its normal arid state. They went and plowed up the range for nothing, and, in the process, killed the one thing that actually did well there (the grass), so that essentially all that's left is dust and sand. Way to go, farmers!

(Aside: This could be a great jumping off point for a discussion about how the argument 'but all people should have X!' sometimes runs aground on the reality of 'but X is not actually possible.' In this case, the 'right' everyone is demanding is his or her own land to farm. But giving them the land doesn't actually accomplish the goal, as the land simply cannot support crops. Nowadays, we want people to have different things--a house, a job, an education, medical care--but we can also run into trouble if we don't stop to think about both *where* this resource is coming from and whether the resource is sustainable. If we don't think about it ahead of time, we end up with a bunch of people who have houses but can't afford the payments, or who have advanced degrees and have no hope of ever paying of the loans they took out to finance their education, etc. The declaration that 'everyone should have X' does not, by itself, bring X into existence. End rant.)

By this time, we've seen Chamberlain's true colors, as he's pretty much been a total self-serving jerk who

doesn't give a rat's patootie about anyone else. This is most notably demonstrated by [SPOILER] his apparent seduction of Brewton's young wife, who he persuades to run away with him to Denver, and then . . . he doesn't go! Yep, that's right. Old Jerkwad Chamberlain convinces another man's wife to leave her husband and go to a new city, and once she leaves, he decides to stay and accept a judicial appointment instead. The Honorable Brice Chamberlain indeed.

'Mean old rancher Brewton', meanwhile, has been kind of a prince in comparison. Sure, he has his hired hands run the 'nesters' off the range at gunpoint, but after his wife runs off, he ends up raising his kids as a single father . . . even the uber blonde one who doesn't bear much of a resemblance to Brewton himself and seems to have a knack for getting into trouble and generally being shady. Rumors abound, but Brewton steadfastly stands by his son, treating him just the same as his other kids and generally just trying to be a good dad. But blondie persists in being a punk, and like his (kind of awful) mother before him, prefers city life and socializing to the hardworking ranch lifestyle. I guess that's another theme of the book: city people kind of suck and can't be trusted.

So yeah. This is a story about awful people doing stupid, awful things to a slightly less awful guy. There's some excellent vaguely violet prose tucked in here and there, but honestly, I would have liked more. Richter is great at waxing eloquent about the beauty of the seemingly desolate plains and describing life there. Here's a sampling of some of my favorite passages:

That lusty pioneer blood is tamed now, broken and gelded like the wild horse and the frontier settlement.

His empire is dead and quartered today like a steer on a meat-block . . .

And I can see his huge parlor, without rugs or furniture, piled to the pine rafters with white sacks of flour and burlapped hills of sugar and green coffee, and wooden buttes of boxed tobacco, dried fruits, and canned tomatoes . . .

Bottom line: It's a decently written book, but not really a great 'Western.' It does make a nice counterpoint to the many Westerns wherein the cattle barons are the bad guys and the trod-upon farmers are the heroic underdogs taking on the Goliaths of the West. Best read in conjunction with other classic Westerns, though. I'm not sure it's quite sturdy enough to stand on its own as a classic.

Sskous says

Graceful, beautiful, evocative writing. Characters are deeply drawn, though the writing is very concise. Amazing work. I'm going to read more by Conrad Richter!
