



# The Rustler: A Tale of Love and War in Wyoming

*Frances McElrath*

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Published in the spring of 1902, the same year as *The Virginian*, Frances McElrath's novel *The Rustler* enjoyed only brief success before fading from public memory. While *The Virginian* has indisputably served as the model for the genre of the Western, *The Rustler* remains virtually unknown.

Although both novels were inspired by the Johnson County massacre, *The Rustler* is an account sympathetic to the perspective of the small cattleman, while *The Virginian* takes the part of the large cattle operations. Both novels also address, with differing conclusions, the clash between the independent Western man and the genteel Eastern woman.

In this story of the stoic, competent, and fiercely independent cowboy Jim and his ill-fated love for the beautiful Hazel Clifford, McElrath offers an alternative view of the West and the standard marriage plot. In contrast to *The Virginian*, *The Rustler* points to the vulnerability of the cowboy ethos and a different sort of redemption for the frivolous Eastern woman. *The Rustler* is also a significant example of the connection between popular and literary traditions whereby sentimentalism, the Western, and a feminist perspective converge in surprising and fascinating ways.



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