

Public Abstract

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Title:Knickerbockers West: How Three American Playwrights Shaped the Image of the American West

In the 1840s, George Catlin, painter and ethnographer of the trans-Mississippi Native Americans, mourned that Few people even know the true definition of the term West and where is its location? phantomlike it flies before us as we travel. Despite the ambiguity associated with the term, however, the American West has remained a compelling force in film, literature and the modern stage, but little research has been directed towards the emergence of this historical-mythical region on the early American stage. The three earliest plays to depict or imagine the West were Alphonso Wetmores The Pedlar in 1821, William Dunlaps A Trip to Niagara in 1828, and James Kirke Pauldings The Lion of the West (later renamed The Kentuckian) in 1831. This study examines how the West is depicted in the plays; discusses how the distinctive nature of each playwrights vision of the West was created through the use of character, setting, language, folklore, and plot; and examines the relationship among the three differing visions. The study also discusses how these relationships (similarities and dissimilarities) may be accounted for by investigating the playwrights backgrounds and their processes of dramatic creation.