

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

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Abstract

The American West has remained a compelling force in films, literature and the modern stage, but little research has been directed towards the emergence of the West on the early American stage. The three earliest plays to depict or imagine the West were Alphonso Wetmore's *The Pedlar* in 1821, William Dunlap's *A Trip to Niagara* in 1828, and James Kirke Paulding's *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 playwright's vision of the West was created through the use of characters, setting, language, folklore and plot; and examines the relationships among the three differing versions. The study also discusses how these relationships (similarities and dissimilarities) may be accounted for by investigating the playwright's backgrounds and their processes of dramatic creation.