



Before the West Was West: Critical Essays on Pre-1800 Literature of the American Frontiers

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Before the West Was West examines the extent to which scholars have engaged in-depth with pre-1800 “western” texts and asks what we mean by “western” American literature in the first place and *when* that designation originated.

Calling into question the implicit temporal boundaries of the “American West” in literature, a literature often viewed as having commenced only at the beginning of the 1800s, *Before the West Was West* explores the concrete, meaningful connections between different texts as well as the development of national ideologies and mythologies. Examining pre-nineteenth-century writings that do not fit conceptions of the Wild West or of cowboys, cattle ranching, and the Pony Express, these thirteen essays demonstrate that no single, unified idea or geography defines the American West.

Contributors investigate texts ranging from the Norse Vinland Sagas and Mary Rowlandson’s famous captivity narrative to early Spanish and French exploration narratives, an eighteenth-century English novel, and a play by Aphra Behn. Through its examination of the disparate and multifaceted body of literature that arises from a broad array of cultural backgrounds and influences, *Before the West Was West* apprehends the literary West in temporal as well as spatial and cultural terms and poses new questions about “westernness” and its literary representation.

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