A Sourcebook of Interdisciplinary Materials in American Drama: J. K. Paulding, "The Lion of the West." Showcasing American Drama.

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*Prepared as part of a project aimed at redressing the neglect of American drama in college and secondary school programs in drama, American literature, and American studies, this booklet provides primary and secondary source materials to assist teachers and students in the study of James K. Paulding's nineteenth century comedy, "The Lion of the West." The first part of the booklet contains (1) a discussion of the Yankee theatre, plays written around a character embodying uniquely American characteristics and featuring specialist American actors; (2) a review of the genesis of the play; (3) its production history; (4) plot summaries of its various versions; (5) its early reviews; (6) biographies of actors appearing in various productions; and (7) a discussion of acting in period plays. The second part of the booklet deals with the real people depicted in the play, specifically Davy Crockett and Mrs. Frances Trollope. In addition, this section discusses the place of the play in American literary history and offers questions to promote class discussion. (FL)
"That time will assuredly come when that same freedom of thought and action which has given such a spur to our genius in other respects will achieve similar wonders in literature. It is then that our early specimens will be sought after with avidity, and that those who led the way in the rugged discouraging path will be honored as we begin to honor the adventurous spirits who first sought, explored, and cleared this western wilderness."

James K. Paulding
INTRODUCTION: To the Reader

Like any art form, the drama reflects, dissect, and frequently affects the culture of which it is a part. This is as true of the plays performed in nineteenth-century America as in this century. However, while many people today know of Death of a Salesman, or can recall the desperate, haunted heroine of A Streetcar Named Desire, or more recently, the two roommates in The Odd Couple, they would be hard pressed to name a native American play of the nineteenth century, much less a major character in it. Yet such plays not only existed, they flourished. The purpose of this sourcebook has been to showcase neglected dramas from the American past so that you may study them for what they are: revelations in some ways of eternal human qualities, yes, but primarily of Americans as they saw themselves at a particular historical moment, and interpreted their actions both to themselves and to others.

The play that has been chosen here is The Lion of the West. Written in 1831 by J. Paulding, a brother-in-law of the novelist Washington Irving, it is a typically American comedy about a bogus English lord who attempts to marry a young American heiress for her money. Luckily, the young woman's country cousin, Colonel Nimrod Wildfire (the lion of the title), rescues her from the fortune hunter's clutches. But while this main plot is developing, the real interest and substance of the play centers on the sub-plot of the Colonel's New York encounter with Mrs. Wollope, an English woman of refinement, whose self-appointed task is to transport "culture" to the colonies and to transport the American character to England. A study of this play will find primary source materials as pictures of some of the actors who appeared in early productions of The Lion of the West, stage designs of the period, actual reviews of performances here and in England, contemporary descriptions of the acting styles of the principals (with biographical bits, too), and what the playwright and the critic had to say about the vehicle.

In addition, since The Lion of the West parodies two real and historically prominent people: the Englishwoman, Mrs. Frances Trollope, author of a celebrated book about the American character based on her travels in this country, and the frontiersman, Davy Crockett, parts of her Domestic Manners of the Americans are excerpted along with some of his autobiographical statements (contained in the article about him). This sourcebook also contains some secondary resource material concerning various aspects of the play. Don't try to read it from beginning to end. Each article is self-contained, and treats the play from a different angle, so browse through it, getting a sense of the various approaches. Reflecting the editor's bias, these are interdisciplinary—historical, biographical, cultural, literary, and theatrical. Remember that we want to help you see the play in its complexity. Even though your course work may be more specialized, we hope you will enjoy this holistic study of The Lion of the West. 

YANKEE THEATRE

Marilyn Miller

When Royall Tyler completed his play The Contrast in 1787, little did he know that he was introducing a character—Yankee Jonathan—who, in his various incarnations, would dominate American theatre for much of the next century. Jonathan's stage entrance also made another kind of history in that he became the first in an uninterrupted line of folkloric characters—among them, backwoodsman Nimrod Wildfire, riverboatman Mike Fink, city-Irish firefighter McSe, and lumberman Paul Bunyan—who appeared on the American stage. And not only was he the first, but because he seemed to summarize the American character to Americans themselves, he became, until the twentieth century, the most important of these Yankee stage personalities. The numerous plays written around the character of Yankee Jonathan performed by specialist American actors constitute what theatre historians now call Yankee theatre. Moreover the evolution of his character throughout the period of his ascendancy discloses much about the shifting values, preoccupations, and self-appraisals of Americans.

The significance of Yankee Jonathan does not end here. For not only did he inspire American playwrights, but he radically altered the relationship between American and English actors; before him, the only actors who counted on the American stage wore English; after him, American actors, at least in comedy, dominated their own theatres. How these changes were accomplished makes a fascinating story. But first, who was Yankee Jonathan? Initially, he appeared as a young boy or man from the country, wearing rustic dress, and speaking in a New England dialect. This early Jonathan displayed independence, an earthy sense of humor, and a simplicity of manner that masked a cunning intelligence. Although in later versions, he might grow old, be a sharp dealer and have different occupations (storekeeper, peddler, etc.), he would retain the characteristics he received at birth.

After The Contrast two plays written by New Englanders are important in tracing the development of Yankee theatre: David Humphreys' The Yankee in England (c. 1815) and Samuel...
...YANKEE THEATRE

Woodworth’s ‘The Forest Rose’ (1825). The contribution of Yankee theatre lies not in what happens on stage but in Humphreys’ notes on the real life Yankee and his seven-page glossary of Yankee terms appended to the text. These were to be used by subsequent Yankee authors as a reference in constructing their own plays. In contrast, the play itself is the thing in ‘The Forest Rose’; its plot becomes the model for all Yankee plays that follow. ‘The Forest Rose’ is notable, too, for its production marks the first time an American actor appears as a Yankee. Meanwhile, a year earlier in London, the famous English comedian Charles Mathews presented a one-man satirical show, ‘A Trip to America’, based on his character sketches of native American types, one of whom was Jonathan W. Doubikin, a character whom Mathews defined as ‘what you must call a Yankee.’ Approximately five months later, Mathews presented more of his impressions of American life, this time in play form. Whereas his earlier sketches had poked good-natured fun at American foibles, ‘A Trip to America’ was more sharply critical, so much so that Americans were outraged by it, and Mathews, responding to their consternation, never played in it again. What had so outraged the Americans was a Yankee character who, in addition to being an uncouth braggart, lacked wit, honesty, or manners, and moreover, acted cruelly to Negroes.

In his two portrayals of Yankees (as well as his portrayal of the Yankee character), Mathews, a brilliant mimic, led to the next stage in the development of the Yankee character. The major star of the period was James Hackett (1800-1871). Between 1826 and 1836 Hackett became the preeminent interpreter of the Yankee. Almost single-handedly, he established this character as the most significant American type on the stage. In doing so, he made it possible for American actors to assume roles on the stages in their own country. (Previously, English actors had monopolized the American theatre.) By searching for new talent, Hackett wrote plays for his new character or by writing them himself. Hackett also influenced the formation of the Yankee theatre. In the period between 1827 and 1832, he introduced eight new pieces, five of which featuring the Yankee including the Lion of the West. In Hackett’s hands, the character shows native wit, barnums skillfully, tells exaggerated stories, and disregards vested authority. Hackett had large ambitions; what he was after was nothing less than to define the American character, to reveal the fabric of his own society.

The times were auspicious for such an attempt. A new theatre-going audience, composed of industrial workers in the cities, was listening; in addition, because of western expansion, new theatres had sprang up, and since actors were needed to perform in them, American actors finally had a chance. Moreover, certain newspapers like ‘The New York Mirror’ and its editor, General Morris, actively encouraged the establishment of an independent American theatre.

Hackett’s success mirrors the decline of Yankee theatre. Unlike his predecessors, he neither added any new Yankee character nor any play to the existing repertoire. And in his portrayal of the Yankee, he seems to have broadened, without any deepening, Marble’s already wide interpretation. With Silsbee, the Yankee grows even larger than life and more uncouth. Perhaps there was really nothing more to be added, for when he dies, the most vital period of Yankee theatre also departs the stage.

Ten years earlier an event had occurred which foreshadowed its demise. In 1845 Anna Cora Mowatt had written ‘Fashion’ for New York. Without dialect or Yankeeisms, Mrs. Mowatt had caricatured the city, but her hero, the farmer Alan Trueman, is simple and straightforward, and unlike other Yankee characters, he comes from a higher level of country life. Fashion signaled that there would be a new comedy, reflecting and appealing to the new middle-class audience in the cities. Through the fifties and the sixties, this audience would increase, and the middle-class comedy it applauded would chart the direction of American theatre during the next two decades.

In various guises, however, the Yankee character remained on stage— as Gumption Coot in Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852), Sa Soucy in The Petrean (1857) and Solon Shingle in The People’s Lawyer (popular in the 1860’s). Split into the low comic peddler as Joe Fletcher in James A. Herne’s Margaret Fleming (1891) and the higher status uncouth Nat Berry in his Shore Acres (1892), the Yankee character survived into the twentieth century. We leave it to our readers to determine whether that peculiar combination of shrewd “common” sense and innocent rambunctiousness has yet disappeared from the American scene.
The Genesis of the Play:

In 1830 the actor-manager James Hackett advertised his first Prize Play Contest. Hackett, one of the actor-managers who dominated the American stage in the early nineteenth century, offered $250 for a three act comedy in which a major character was to be a native American. Two plays were submitted, and Hackett chose The Lion of the West as the winner.

Both playwright and sponsor proved lucky, for the result of their combined effort was a play that happily wedded the spirit of the age, the local, and the theatrical needs of the star to produce an indigenous, idiosyncratic, and congenial comedy-farce.

The spirit of the age was youthfully optimistic. Self-confident and seeking to establish their intellectual independence from the mother country, Americans were in a generally self-aggrandizing mood. The country's territorial expansionism found a counterpart in the boasts of Nimrod Wildfire; its naive assumptions that the land would yield unlimited largesse had an echo in Nimrod's generosity. These traits were presented positively, and the effect was that of the patriotic Kentucky Colonel, conqueror of the Indians and the wilderness, represented America to itself as it wished to be seen. (Since the play did not do as well on tour in the western states as elsewhere, it would seem that Nimrod was too broad a caricature for westerners to accept.) For the English, however, and even some of the eastern theatre-going public, Nimrod was a "foreign" exotic, yet with his good-natured, spontaneous liveliness and expansiveness, he was a folk hero who came to be seen as quintessentially American.

The Dramatic Past:

When The Lion of the West was written, American playwrights were still imitating English models. At the time, English comedy was infused with the democratic spirit. This was in contrast to the previous genre, the brilliantly sardonic Restoration comedy, which, because it catered to a small, aristocratic audience, assumed that large fortunes, titles, great wit, and style were essential to life. In contrast, the basically democratic Georgian comedy was written to appeal to the huge audiences needed to fill the new Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres. These theatres held 3013 and 3611 patrons respectively in the eighteenth century.

Nineteenth Century Theatre:

Thus comedies appealed to a middle-class morality. "Ridicule," cautioned the English critic Richard Steele, "should be good natured, directed at the singularities of essentially lovable people." The most popular dramatic form during the eighteenth century was sentimental comedy. Gradually, as the century wore on, the plots became mere vehicles, and audience interest lay in the star performers' repertoire and stage presence. As a result, stereotype characters became more prevalent, and, by the nineteenth century, the most successful comedy was Colman the Younger's John Bull; or An Englishman's Fire-side (1803), which became standard repertory fare. In this popular play, Colman contrasts a preoccupation with status and wealth on the part of pseudo-fashionable London with the perennially sound values of the English country hearth and home, throwing in for good measure the charm and whimsical generosity of the Irish. The parallels to Paulding's play are self-evident.

The Script:

Luckily for this project, the English stage differed significantly from the American in at least one respect: in England, due to censorship, all plays had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office. Thus when Hackett took his American hit to London in 1833, he filed a copy as required, and this version is the one recovered by James Tidwell (see his introduction to the play text). American plays were not subject to such scrutiny. Therefore, no script of an American play of this period is likely to be accurate or complete. Why? Because the actor treated his anecdotes in commedia dell' arte fashion—improvising, extending lines, speeches, and bits which made a hit with the audience, and also substituting local references; in short, he reworked his material much as a modern stand-up comic might do. However, the basic character remained the same, no matter how the actor managed the lines, or even how the playwright changed the script.

Having summaries of the plots of the first two versions of The Lion of the West enables us to observe the changing dramatic fashions. The plots, characters, and even moods of the various versions differ significantly, although the hero retains his personality and style.

The First Version:

Relying on the ultimate capitulation of the heroine to a code of submission to parental authority, the first version is the most sentimental. From its plot summary, it appears to be closer to the third than to the second version. Cecilia Bramble is comparable to Caroline Freeman; both are marriageable heiresses courted by several men, one of whom is a fake nobleman only after money. (That in the first version he is French rather than English seems a minor point.) Also, in both versions Wildfire is the ingénue's visiting cousin. And in each version he challenges the villain to a duel with rifles, exposing the so-called count's cowardice. Runaway horses, a fancy ball, the planned
... DRAMATIC FORM

The Third Version:

In its third version, the play is technically a farce; that is, it depends for effect more upon the physical action and stock comic situations which occur from the encounters of the stereotypical characters than from the development of the play's action or the complexity of individualized character. What is still emphasized, however, is the new type of character which Paulding had created.

Plot Interest:

Among the by now familiar comic devices are the tag names (Freeman and Wollope) to indicate the characters' significance or nature, the ridicule of pseudonoble forebears, the false identity, the comic duel, the cries of "murder!" and the deliberate use of stock villainy and melodrama for humor (as in "Then, my dear brother, shoot him instantly," and "Who's that coming up the stairs?").

Most notable in Bernard's revision, however, is the way in which the main plot and subplot comment indirectly on each other. Thus the conventional comic plot, which ends in the marriage plans of the young couple, is contrasted with Nimrod's proposal to Mrs. Wollope. Similarly, the play's theme, which has involved the unmasking of a pretended nobleman in each of the three versions, now uses Mrs. Wollope's pot "project," "the refinement of American manners," to raise the fundamental question of what constitutes "true" refinement or nobility. Surely Nimrod's generosity, warmth, and spontaneous good humor constitute the nobility of nature's gentleman, as Americans wished to see it.

But the characterization of Nimrod and Mrs. Wollope is more interesting than this abstract opposition suggests, and much of the humor comes from the deep clash of cultures, not merely from the superficial matter of manners or linguistic styles.

Moreover, is it possible that, just as Nimrod admires Mrs. Wollope and seems ready to marry her, she is more fascinated by him than she might be willing to admit? For example, when she swallows all his tall tales and is ready to stay in this "uncivilized" country, she no doubt adds a comic situation to the unfortunate Mrs. Wollope who prints wild stories in Domestic Manners as if they were her own eyewitness accounts. And she seems ready to stay in this "uncivilized" country until told that the Americans will not subscribe to her Academy. Most telling is her plan to "lead him [i.e., Wildfire] as I please." Surely the mutual attraction of the lady of...
...DRAMATIC FORM

...and willingness to accept his uncle's personality, but the reprinted Wollope story, like the Falstaff for which Hackett was best known, has a long stage life, but they seem far more than stock creations. I would like to agree that the characters other than these two lack any personality, but the reprinted Times review of April 11, 1833, seems too harsh in its judgment that Mrs. Wollope is "very feebly managed."

As for Nimrod, he refuses to fit any stereotypes we might have associated with his plot situation. It would have been hardly surprising to find in him something of a braggart soldier, like the Falstaff for which Hackett was best known, but Nimrod doesn't fit the mold; he's not a coward. Nor is he a trickster who gets what he wants by dishonesty and slyness. It is tempting to see him as an id figure, as he is so full of spontaneous good spirits and energy, but his generosity to others and willingness to accept his uncle's correction evade that classification.

Rather, we must conclude that Nimrod Wildfire, like other stage Yankees, is an indigenous creation. That he has had numberless imitators and can still set us to laughing is perhaps the best substantiation of his significance and that of this landmark American drama, as well.

PRODUCTION HISTORY OF THE LION OF THE WEST

The production history of this play has been carefully detailed in two scholarly articles: the first by Nelson P. Adkins called "James K. Paulding's 'The Lion of the West,'" American Literature, III (November, 1933), 249-258, and the second by Francis Hodge called "Biography of a Lost Play," Theatre Annual, 14 (1954), 48-61. Since both articles were written before the recovery of its lost text, some space in each was devoted to explaining the play's importance, bawling its loss, trying to reconstruct it from quotes and the summaries available of the first two versions, and detailing Hackett's success with it.

A few of these details are worth noting. Adkins quotes liberally from the original reviews (samples of which are shown below). He discloses that Hackett received "an average [box-office take] exceeding nine hundred dollars a night," a circumstance we believe unprecedented in the history of any comedy produced on our stage, in November of 1831. Adkins' admirably thorough research also revealed that the play "so incensed the half-aligator [sic] boys, the yellow flowers of the forest, as the [sic] call themselves, that they threatened 'to row him up Salt River,' if he ventured a repetition of the objectionable performance."

Hodge speculates on Hackett's role in emphasizing Wildfire's resemblance to Crockett. Just as in our own day, when any fictionalized treatment of a famous political personality gains in popularity as people recognize its resemblance to the "real life" source, so the play gained from the "rumor," which spread on the road tour. "Had Hackett a hand in this?" asks Hodge, reporting that "Hackett was an opportunist."

Hodge also discusses the English reception of the play, noting that "for the first time an American actor had been received without unobtrusiveness and a coldly critical comparison with British stage luminaries. This was a significant victory not only for Hackett but for The Kentuckian as well." "Colonel Nimrod, Wildfire, won many valuable friends for America. Hackett, the American ambassador of good will,"

Citing the enthusiasm for the play's long stage life, Hodge concludes that "The wild independence of this hombred Westerner was in the air, for he was an expression of Jacksonian democracy. He was America, and in him the new raw-boned, hard-working man of the lower classes, who were beginning to come to the theatre, saw something of themselves, and they stayed to laugh and admire."

Not everyone admired Nimrod Wildfire, as a reading of the reviews from England reproduced here will show. It is most interesting in dealing with almost any play to try to determine the writer's attitude toward his or her characters and material; since, unlike the novelist, playwrights cannot ordinarily (there are exceptions) speak directly to the audience to comment on their characters. Thus, playwrights assume that the audience's attitudes toward the characters' actions are similar to their own. Only in this way can they provide what T. S. Eliot called the "objective correlative," that is, the stage actions which will "justify" the audience reaction.

"A Box at the Theatre," from Trollopie's Theatre. "Mr. Hackett's new production of Wildfire..."
To give a minor example, when Nimrod greets Mrs. Wallope by a democratic handshake instead of kissing her hand, we are mildly amused. When he fails to remove his hat in her presence, a modern audience might not even notice the rudeness. It is not until he puts his feet on what should be her seat and sticks the offensive (and offensive) hat under her nose that we get the point.

The 1831 audience would have seen his behavior as far more boorish and, therefore, more amusing or more offensive as their own values dictated. Thus Edward Thomas Coke, an English traveler, objectifies his own values and places them in Paulding's mind when he reports that “the play is intended to censure and correct the rough manners of the states west of the Alleghany mountains.”

The best way to judge the audience's response to the play, however, is to read the original reviews themselves. We have reprinted a generous sampling of these following the plot summaries of the first two versions.

But the importance of this play should not be judged on the basis of contemporary reviewers' reactions, nor from Hackett's perspective, nor even entirely on its aesthetic merit. Rather, it should be seen as the forerunner of innumerable plays, movies, and other memorabilia about the American western folk hero; an image that this country has still not outgrown.

**PLOT SUMMARIES**

**Paulding's Lion: The Original Version**

The Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, April 27, 1831.

Cecilia Bramble, only daughter of Governor Bramble, a senator, a young lady deeply smitten with admiration of distinguished foreigners, and ardently desirous of visiting Paris. An Heiress [sic], the Count de Crillon, a noted swindler and imposter of that time in Washington, takes advantage of this foible, knowing that Cecilia has recently received a generous inheritance. He proceeds to the city of Paris, and there pays his addresses to her, and being contemptuously rejected by her father, at length inveigles her into an elopement, which is frustrated however by the accidental running away of the horses; the inmates of the hotel are alarmed, and rush forth in a great variety of costume, among the rest Cecilia and Pullet, her maid, in their travelling dresses, for the elopement.—These excite the attention and suspicions of Roebuck, the Governor, and the Colonel. The latter, armed with whispers in the ear, a threat to blow his brains out the first opportunity. In consequence of this, Higgins places a pair of loaded pistols at his bedside that night, which happens to be the night of the second elopement.

When all is quiet, the Count appears and joins his daughter to Cecilia, a noted swindler and imposter of that time in Washington, takes advantage of this foible, and being contemptuously rejected by her father, stumbles over him and falls; the inmates of the hotel are alarmed, and rush forth in a great variety of costume, among the rest Cecilia and Pullet, her maid, in their travelling dresses, for the elopement. These excite the attention and suspicions of Roebuck, the Governor, and the Colonel. The latter, armed with whispers in the ear, a threat to blow his brains out the first opportunity. In consequence of this, Higgins places a pair of loaded pistols at his bedside that night, which happens to be the night of the second elopement.

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... PLOT SUMMARIES ...

during many years of commercial prosperity, and 
conveys the infant to a place of security, and 
favours her guardian, adventurer, has been incessant in his endeavors 
gain her affections and fortune. Fredonia 
herself, Miss Albina Towertop, late of Towertop Manor House, Hop 
Hill Park, Kent, England," receives a letter, 
which announces the speedily arrival of Mr. B.'s 
nephew, Nimrod Wildfire, known as "Old Kentuck." The 
exploits of this humorous, unpolished, 
old acquaintance and swindler in horse flesh. 
It is too late--Lord Luminary and Casual 
arrive with the others confirms it--and 
Fredonia is restored by Bonnybrown to that 
breast, from which he had humanely taken her 
on the bloody field of Lundy's Lane. 

A quarrel now takes place between 
Coquinard and Groundling, his associate, this 
has burst in upon him in the presence of all the family, compels him to the 
disclosure of the whole plot. Tidings are now 
brought of Casual's sudden departure with arms, 
and the parties hasten to prevent the expected 
ousage. It is too late--Lord Luminary and Casual 
have met--the former has fled, the latter is 
slightly wounded. The report of fire-arms has 
drawn to the scene an English traveller, whose 
coach was passing at the time. It is 
illegitimate, now Major Lexington, the father of 
Fredonia, who has returned, after long foreign 
foreign exchange, in search of his child. A highly 
wrought scene between Major Lexington and 
Casual, ends in the conviction, in the mind of the 
former, that Fredonia is his daughter--her 
remains as originally drawn by the author for 
revisions.

The confession of Dogwood now solves the 
mystery of Casual's birth,--my Lord Luminary 
and his associates are duly provided for and the 
group are made perfectly happy by the 
arrival of Nimrod Wildfire, Esq. and his 
amiable (intended) lady "Miss Patty Snag of 
Salt Licks"-- and, to use the words of the 
delighted Kentuckian, "there's no back out in 
the country side, and she shot a bear at nine years old." 
Casual, Bonnybrown, Luminary, Satellite, 
Scum, Dogwood, Miss Towertop, and Fredonia, 
are additions by Mr. Stone and the Kentuckian 
remains as originally drawn by the author for 
Mr. Hackett.

EARLY REVIEWS: Reviews of First Version

Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer, 
April 27, 1831.

"Paulding's comedy--Lion of the West-- 
This production of our distinguished 
townsmen was brought out of the Park Theatre 
before an extremely crowded house on Monday 
evening last. The city is at present full of 
Western merchants, strangers from Kentucky, 
Tennessee, Ohio and the contingent states. 
They crowded to the theatre on the night in 
question and received with great applause the 
successful hits of the author and the actor. 
Curiosity was considerably excited and from 
all that we heard and saw, it was fully and 
emphatically gratified....
Colonel Wildfire... [is] an extremely racy representation of Western blood, a perfect non-pareil, half steamboat, half alligator etc. [He] possesses many original traits which never before have appeared on the stage...

The amusing extravagances and strange features of character which have grown up in the western states are perhaps unique in the world itself. Wildfire is calm and dignified as a hero which he feels himself to be. It is the odd contrast between dignity and calmness of demeanor, and the high flights of Western fancy that marks the Western original.

Of the play itself... we cannot speak too highly of it. Possessing all of the peculiar points, wit, sarcasm and brilliancy of Paulding, it shows him in a quite pleasing light—that of a successful delineator of native manners and indigenous character. There are materials enough in this wide country to construct a school of comedy peculiarly our own. Why not collect them? Mr. Paulding has set an example worthy of being followed up."

James H. Hackett as Nimrod Wildfire, a role modeled on heroic backwoodsmen like Davy Crockett, HLY.

Reviews of Second Version:

Morning Courier, November 11, 1831.
[Entire item as follows]
"Tomorrow night Hackett will appear in "The Lion of the West," when all the world will be in attendance—expectation is on tiptoe, to see this eighth wonder of the world."

Morning Courier, November 24, 1831.
"Mr. Hackett's benefit on Tuesday, was exceedingly well attended, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather. The roaring of the "Lion of the West" was echoed as usual by the audience, and the imitations in the interlude interrupted with constant and deafening thunders of applause. At the fall of the curtain there was one universal and continuous call kept up for Mr. Hackett, who promptly answered it in propria persona... Mr. Hackett returned thanks for "the indulgence the public had uniformly extended, not only to himself in the performance, but to the inexperienced attempts of our native dramatists in drawing characters indigenous to this country," and concluded by assuring the audience, that "encouraged by their kindness and liberal patronage he should continue his best endeavors to deserve it."

Reviews from England

Morning Courier, April 11, 1833.
Mr. Hackett—London Theatricals—
It is a source of great satisfaction to learn by the recent arrival from Liverpool that our countryman Hackett has been eminently successful in his character of Colo. Nimrod Wildfire."

The Times of the 11th, a paper which always takes the lead in theatricals as in politics, holds the following language in relation to his debut.

COVENT GARDEN

"... It is difficult for us, on this side of what Colonel Wildfire calls "the big pond," to enter fully into the whim of such a personage; but the oddity of his dialect and the effect of his stories are irresistible. The actor and the character, however, labour under great disadvantages in this farce, which is very clumsy and ineffective. It would have been practicable, without any great effort of ingenuity, to have made the Kentuckian sustain a part properly belonging to the drama: but here the drama is evidently written only for the purpose of bringing him on the stage, and so badly written, that the actor has not the slightest support or relief from the other personages. The plot is the most meagre that can be imagined: the introduction of an English female tourist—a notion meagre that can be imagined: the introduction of an English female tourist—a notion which might have been made the vehicle of much good-humoured satire—is very feebly managed, and the other characters have no weight at all. Notwithstanding these disadvantages, and, as he was solely upon his own resources, Mr. Hackett acquitted himself with great credit."

The Athenian speaks of Mr. Hackett's performance in these terms: "The principal character is Colonel Nimrod Wildfire, a Kentuckian, and it is represented by Mr. Hackett with a degree of ease and spirit which rank him high as an actor, and with such truth and force, that it cannot fail to be greatly amusing to those who have ever met with any of the originals from whom it is drawn; while those who have not, may safely take it upon trust as a genuine portrait. The audience on Saturday took praiseworthy pains to understand the part, and as soon as they did, they relished it much and laughed heartily. Some of the tough Kentuckian stories, as told by Mr. Hackett, have appeared before... but
provide income to the lucky impersonator for a lifetime. Indeed, Hackett played Nimrod to enthusiastic audiences as late as 1862, although by the time "most [of the play's] jokes had lost their point." Perhaps Hackett kept the play unpublished to protect his monopoly. However, the casual treatment of American drama in this country certainly contributed to our almost total loss of this landmark play.

Hackett was considered the finest Falstaff of his time, touring England four times in seven years as the fat knight. He was a theatrical scholar: his notes on Hamlet testify to his careful study, and he initiated the construction of the Shakespeare monument in New York's Central Park.

A vivid description of his acting was given in his obituary in The New York Tribune of December 29, 1871:

The essence of his conception pointed to a very stern individuality, latent within the humor and conviviality of the man—and that, we always thought, was the basis of Mr. Hackett's acting. With respect to method he was a bold artist. He painted with broad and vigorous strokes and gave little, or no heed to details and delicacy of finish. His greatness consisted in the vigorous illustration of strongly defined eccentric character and the unconscious expression of that everlasting comicality which such characters dispense upon the conduct of life.

Actresses: Wheatley and Gibbs.

All accounts of the performances of The Lion of the West agree in praising Hackett's acting. The other members of the cast are either merely named, or faulted for their comparative weakness. Odell, for example, after giving the cast list for the Bernard (or third) version as performed in New York remarks "how weak the company! Soon the Mirror will reflect weakness upon the conduct of life."

In New York, Mrs. Wheatley was our Mrs. Wollope. She had also played the comparable role of Miss Towertop in the John Augustus Stone (or second) version. Here again, both Odell and the Mirror are harsh, the former saying that "The Lantern of the West... was regarded as unsatisfactory, though Backett's Colonel Nimrod Wildfire wore a genuine contribution to the gallery of American dramatic types."

Mrs. Wheatley, however, is elsewhere enthusiastically described: "For more than twenty years, in the line of comical, middle-aged and old women, rich or poor, refined or vulgar, indeed of every grade, she was entirely unrivalled on the American stage."

In London, Mrs. Wollope, then called Mrs. Luminary, was performed by Mrs. Gibbs, who also won no praise for her role: "Mrs. Luminary, (Mrs. Gibbs,) in whom it was intended to castigate Mrs. Trollope, is very weak; the author should have bitten it in [italics in original] as engravers say, in aquafortis; whereas the satire is diluted lemon juice."

The criticism seems to be both of the part as written and as performed by Mrs. Gibbs. However, she was given no praise in the "Memoir of Celebrated Actresses". The anonymous author writes that Mrs. Gibbs "was the best actress in broad comedy—at least, she was equal in that line to Mrs. Haviland or Miss Fanny Kelly. Her figure and face especially..."
... THE PLAYERS

qualifying her to shine in characters of this description. She was naturally vivacious, and her voice had more of the fulness and jollity of the humour of humble life than either of the two last-named ladies. "She was pretty well acknowledged to be very pleasing, if not positively a lovely woman; and, even at the age of sixty, she looked as fresh, young, and comely, that she might have passed, in the eye of a stranger, as one of her own daughters. Mrs. Gibb's professional career was a long one: she remained on the boards till her years numbered more than three score years." We may assume that, as the play was written for Hackett's talents, and he availed himself of the age's indulgence for a star's improvisational extravagances, he outshone his partners consistently. Perhaps our age is more willing to give Mrs. Wollope a sympathetic ear. This writer, at any rate, is not so willing to declare Nimrod the only winner in recent American acting in the nineteenth century was based on training in elocution. The florid style and flamboyance of the politician and the pulpit orator were also at home on the American stage. Not only did elocutionists emphasize the importance of careful articulation, pitch modulations, varied volume, dramatic changes in tempo, artful manipulation of rhythms and accents, and other voice and diction techniques, which were often rather removed from the customs of ordinary speech, but they also urged a system of sound and gestures, keyed to famous words and ideas expressing such "emotions" as defiance, desecration, despair, elation, or ecstasy. One of the most admired American actors in the mid-nineteenth century was Edwin Forrest, noted for his muscular body and his equally muscular playing. By the standards of Stanislavsky and Strasberg, Forrest would have made a fine "Method" actor, since in his day he was an insane asylum to learn such plays as Oedipus Rex or King Lear, are generally revived in an archaelogically accurate production. They are not forgotten fossils of the drama, exhumed in an archaeologically accurate production. Even if such an effort were successfully made, how would an average audience know that? Or appreciate it? The chances are that a faithful reconstruction of a Neo-classic French tragedy as produced in Paris in Racine's time would either bore a modern audience—or leave it shaking with helpless laughter at the lofty posing, the elegant attitudes, and the artificial declamation of the poetic text. Within certain limits, that could also be true of an attempt to recreate a stage-performance style for historic American dramas such as Tyler's The Contrast, Howatt's Fashion or Boucicaut's Octoroon. Edwin Dyer's The Players points out in his excellent history of performance, The Length and Depth of Acting, much American acting in the nineteenth

ACTING IN PERIOD PLAYS

Glen Loney

Just how much historical accuracy should there be in a modern stage production of a play written in—or about a different period? If the set and costume designers are striving to recreate the decors, the actors then also make to reflect the passions and manners of ordinary men in their daily lives. Comedy, of course, mocking pretension, sham, and folly, allowed humorous exaggeration but was based on an acute observation of the contemporary fashions in dress, attitudes, movements, and manners. The great plays from the long march of theatre history, works such as Oedipus Rex or King Lear, are generally preserved because they still have the power to fascinate audiences with the playwright's understanding of the complexities of human character and to project those effectively and absorbingly on the stage. They are not forgotten fossils of the drama, exhumed in an archaeologically accurate production. Even if such an effort were successfully made, how would an average audience know that? Or appreciate it? The chances are that a faithful reconstruction of a Neo-classic French tragedy as produced in Paris in Racine's time would either bore a modern audience—or leave it shaking with helpless laughter at the lofty posing, the elegant attitudes, and the artificial declamation of the poetic text. Within certain limits, that could also be true of an attempt to recreate a stage-performance style for historic American dramas such as Tyler's The Contrast, Howatt's Fashion or Boucicaut's Octoroon. Edwin Dyer's The Players points out in his excellent history of performance, The Length and Depth of Acting, much American acting in the nineteenth

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another place and time, without sounding or looking peculiar? One piece of advice is not to watch Dallas for acting models, but instead study some of the British television epics set in other periods. To see British actors recreate the play of Queen Victoria is not to howl with laughter at their ridiculous gestures, rhetorical flourishes, and extremely artificial manners. Quite the opposite; in the best of such shows, somehow the performances seem very natural, thoroughly believable. Yet the characters portrayed clearly represent different values, different attitudes, different manners. What's basic, of course, is the truth the actors have brought to their characterization.

What's different, but right for the period evocation, is the keen awareness of the details of daily life in another time and place. There is clearly a difference in the way a brash, much frontierman will walk, stand, gesture, smile and talk—for instance—as opposed to a prim, proper, reserved, and somewhat pretentious dowager.

Young actors, reared in a contemporary society which rejects the class distinctions of the past, are often unaware of what these distinctions were—or how to play them. The best advice, of course, is to study not only the historic play, but also other documents of the time which will help make the people and places real. This includes studying drawings and prints of houses, interiors, costumes, important public events, and manner like. If this seems like a lot of extra work, it's nonetheless rewarding to do and will subtly add to the believability of what's achieved on stage.

For some teachers of acting, period style is little more than learning how to use a fan, how to take off, how to make a curtsey. Obviously, such things are important, but they are not the core of style—truth is. There is an excellent explanation of acting style in general in F. Cowle Strickland's The Technique of Acting (Chap. 12/McGraw-Hill). Strickland points to some 28 definitions of Style in the Oxford English Dictionary, suggesting that the word can mean many things, even to an actor. Thus, it's not merely a matter of seeming to be ladies and gentlemen of Restoration London nor a Chorus of Elders in ancient Thebes.

Strickland, who directed at Washington's Arena Theatre, prefers a broader application: "the manner of expression characteristic of a particular writer, or of a literary group or period;" that is, the ways in which playwrights communicate their visions of people require specific styles. The style of Arthur Miller in telling the story of Willy Loman is different from that of Neil Simon in telling the story of the Odd Couple or the red hot lover.

The language of the play is also an important element in the acting style. In nineteenth century American dramas, there is often an elegance, even an artificiality of expression, which is not customary today. Polite conversation is much more direct—even to the point of being impolite. In some nineteenth century plays, however, there is a decorum to be preserved in conversational exchanges, even between people who are obviously angry. If such lines are played as being awkward and old-fashioned, merely words to be rattled off as swiftly as possible so the actors can "get on with the plot," a valuable aspect of period style—and period truth—will have been neglected or sabotaged.

It's a convention of many dramas—serious or comic—before the triumph of stage-realism to have characters confide in the audience, with no one else on stage seeming to hear these "asides." Sometimes a character will give the audience a bit of information they need to know about the past or the future. Often, a character will tell the spectators what he or she feels about what's going on at the moment. The problem for the actor in a period play is to stay in character, develop and maintain this contact with the audience, and avoid being artful or "cute" about it. In a way, especially in a comedy, the playwright seems to have the actor say: "You'll get more out of this scene if you have this bit of important information. I want to share it with you, but the others up here mustn't know I've told you about it!" What this requires is a clever shifting from a representational style to a presentational one. And back again. In the play, the actor remains the character—does not become himself as actor—but he briefly interrupts his concentration and involvement with the other characters to relate directly to the audience. It's not easy to do and stay in character. It's also not easy to do and resist the temptation to make a play for the audience's affection and applause as an actor.

The kind of dialogue a playwright gives to each character—given if all the roles are in verse—tells an actor something about a character's mentality, values, background, and similar matters. It's clear from such dialogue that New York society matrons of the nineteenth century were nothing like those of today in some of their ways of thinking and speaking. In others, however, they are clearly sisters under the skin—which is one of the charming features of The Lion of the West making it both amusing and understandable even today.

F. Cowles Stickland makes a great point about the environment, the milieu, as a
Scenic Design in the Early American Theatre

To determine what American scenic design was like in our native theatres involves a good bit of guesswork and use of indirect evidence. There are excellent records of continental and English practices, and much evidence to suggest that whatever was current in England was adopted in our country as soon as possible. It is known, for example, that the British staged plays here during the Revolutionary War for their own amusement.

By 1777 Major Andre painted backdrops for a production, and when Mignell and Reinagle opened the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, they arranged to get the latest plays, set designs, and models for their construction seen in London. Mrs. Trollope, too, remarks that "the scenery and machinery [at the Bowery Theatre is] equal to any in London." So it might be useful to study London Theatre practices.

In 1794 when the new Drury Lane opened, we hear rather more about the scenery than the acting. In an early production of Macbeth, after an epilogue "hurled at the Fire Flies . . . the curtain was then rapidly turned into a vast lake upon which a man was rowing a boat while a cascade tumbled down at the back." Walter Scott complained in 1819 that "Show and machinery have usurped the place of tragic poetry." Gerald Grigg pointed out that "the managers seek only to fill their houses, and don't care a curse for all the dramatists that ever lived. There is a rage for fire, and water, and horses got abroad."

In this country, too, "from the very beginning of our theatrical history scenery was considered essential to a prosperous enterprise." The earliest American sets were stock flats arranged on each side of the stage as wings, with a scenic backing of two abutted flats ("shutters") which could open like modern sliding doors to reveal another scene behind them. But by 1794, the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia had a scenic backdrop (which could be drawn up into the flies when not needed) and a set-back series of side wings. This method of stage design remained in favor until the late 1800's, although the box set was introduced in England as early as the 1830's.

Scenic design gained rapidly in sophistication, so that, by 1811, when an investigation of a backstage fire caused the details to be documented, we learn that a chandelier on a stage set was raised into the flies with a wick still lit. Thirty-five scenes were hanging there to catch fire! Deliberate fire effects, earthquakes, bridges which collapsed, volcanos and floods also became possible. By 1822, a four-foot-by-fourteen-foot treadmill had been constructed for chariot races and runaway horses.

All these marvelous descriptions create a problem, for the hyperbole associated with modern theatre seems also to have been considered essential from the beginning. In other words, if we judge only by the written descriptions, we will be greatly impressed. By 1806, for example, J. J. Holland demonstrated his skill as a machinist [for Cinderella] arranging the transformations of mice to horses, pumpkin to carriage, etc. . . ." Or as one contemporary reported, "the clouds in which Hymen and the Cupids ascend and descend have quite lost your wits."
effect," while another remarked that "We never saw anything more costly, or changes that were more cleverly managed." Yet Holland's scenic design for Adelmone the outlaw from 1802 is disappointing. Clifford E. Hamar, after quoting one impressive description of early set design after another, climaxes the lot by quoting the following advertisement for a St. Louis production in 1825:

In the 1st act . . . GRAND ERUPTION OF
MOUNT VESUVIUS. TERRIFIC EXPLOSION!!
Forked Lightnings (sic) Bend the Sky!
The BURNING LAVA Impetuously Flows down
the side of the Mountain . . . ILLUMINATED!!
FENELLA Plunges into the Sea!
GRAND DISPLAY OF FIREWORKS!!

Having asked how realistic these effects were, Hamar answers by quoting a communication to the St. Louis Republican from 1828, suggesting that those in charge of effects "refrain from exposing themselves to the audience." In general, however, sets were more mundane; most American theatres had a standard garden, moonlight set, interior, kitchen and exterior street. With different wings, these were made to serve a variety of settings. For example, the Booth Theatre sets for Rip Van Winkle, dated 1873, call for the "Lady of Lyons" kitchen in Act III, sc. 5.

While the Freeman's home was certainly not rustic, the elegant town house interior was probably similarly all-purpose. We simply don't know what the set of The Lion of the West looked like. It probably used one stock interior backdrop with wings and another stock garden exterior. Students wishing to perform scenes in class would do well to use only the props called for in the action and leave the rest to the audience's imagination.

Acting Out A Scene

An obvious meaning of the word play is to play-act and we'd like to suggest that you stage some of these scenes in your classroom. You might do the party scene with a large cast, appropriate music and action. Or try the beginning of Act II until Mrs. Wollope's collapse. As both of these depend on large casts and rapid movement, they are difficult to imagine and work very well. Last you might try the initial meeting between Nimrod and Mrs. Wollope, being inventive in displaying your contrasting views on manners. You might even want to improvise, updating the scene, demonstrating how you'd behave to show off your Americanisms to an impressionable foreign visitor.

However you choose to enact these scenes, we hope the preceding articles on theatrical matters will have proven helpful to you. All the plays in this series are significant examples of culture at play in another sense, however—that of play in a joint. It fits, but there's some give in it. Plays are constructs in the real world while simultaneously creating a fictive one. In the theatre, we pretend, but we take the pretense seriously, at least provisionally, so that we can try out our assumptions about how we see ourselves and others. Paulding and Hackett were trying out their assumptions here, found that audiences appreciated them, and Nimrod Wildfire was born.

In our next section, we will deal with the play from several historical perspectives. Perhaps when you know more about Davy Crockett and Frances Trollope, you will find this fictive encounter between such colorful representatives of contrasting cultures thought provoking.
PART II: THE REAL PEOPLE DEPICTED IN THE PLAY

American Life in Another Time: Primary and Secondary Resource Materials

Davy Crockett, the Man
Florence Polatnick

In dealing with Davy Crockett, the historian has difficulty asaying in what proportion the gold nugget of fact has become alloyed with braggadocio, nationalistic propaganda, political image-making, and myth-building. Although Crockett authorship is claimed for a number of books, all were ghost-written. In only one, his autobiography, did he have a major part. There are many contemporary accounts of our hero and subsequent accounts of his life, and of the national self-image, but little consensus. Was he "vain, ignorant, simple minded," a charlatan, a phony? Or was he indeed a free son of the untamed wilderness, a naive but shrewd actor and commentator on the American scene, and a steadfast champion of the common man on the Western frontier?

Davy Crockett was born in 1786 in a log cabin in northeastern Tennessee, the son of a tavern-keeper who had fought in the Revolutionary War. Enrolled in school at the age of 13, Davy cut out after five days. To escape the inevitable beating from his father, the lad ran away. He helped herd cattle, drove a wagon, and worked for a succession of farmers.

Crockett matured in a society where men drank hard, swore exuberantly, bet and worked for a succession of armers. He helped herd cattle, drove a wagon, and worked for a succession of farmers. Furthermore, there was the question of cheap land, a problem that was to be Crockett's major concern for the rest of his life and which ultimately led to his political downfall and indirectly to his death. North Carolina had distributed land warrants to Revolutionary War veterans and also to redeem the Specie Certificates it had issued to pay for the war. In 1789 North Carolina offered the Federal Government territory which would become the state of Tennessee to be reserved as public lands. Unfortunately, the eastern part was not large enough to fill all of the claims. There was widespread fraud--using names of deceased veterans, pre-dating, speculation. Inaccurate and inadequate records added to the mess. A man who had used his warrant to obtain a parcel of land and build a home and improvements could be bumped by someone holding a warrant with an earlier date.

Another obvious injustice was that all land was taxed equally, regardless of its worth. This fell heavily on the frontiersman who had to tame the wilderness before it could become productive and who did not have the benefit of a developed infrastructure to support his economic activities. Squatters on public land
were the most frequent victims of these legal injustices, and these were the constituents for whom Davy Crockett fought.

Crockett ran for Congress in 1825 and was defeated, but two years later he tried again and was elected. There are many hilarious stories about his stump-speaking at camp meetings, turkey shoots, squirrel hunts, "frolics," "stomp-downs," and barbecues. Entertainment on the frontier was sparse, and Davy put on a good show. On one occasion he insisted on speaking first. He had memorized his opponent's remarks, delivered them elocutently, and left the man literally speechless.

Another time Davy's constituents let him know that they could not continue to listen on "such a dry subject as the welfare of the nation" until they had something to drink. The bartender insisted on cash on the barrelhead. The humorist shot a racoon, and offered it for payment for a quart of rum. Betsy, shot a racoon, and offered its skin in payment for another bottle. Every time the voters became too dry to listen, Davy pulled the same trick on the unsuspecting bartender. "The joke secured me my election, for it soon circulated like smoke among my constituents, and they allowed that the man who could get the whip hand of Job Snelling in fair trade, could outwit Old Nick himself, and was the real joker for them in Congress." Amidst the exaggerations, the picturesque language, and the racy backwoods humor, Crockett philosophized, "popularity sometimes depends on a very small matter indeed; in this particular it was worth a quart of New England rum, and no more."

According to the legend, he whirled into Washington, "I'm that same David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half-alligator, a little touched with the snapping-turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a snapping-turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a

Davy Crockett later came into further conflict with the political power that centered in the eastern part of the state. After the United States Congress had passed the 1831 Tariff Act, Crockett assailed "State speculation" in land and warned of a "swindling machine." Thus he was inevitably thrown into conflict with the political power that centered in the mature settlements of eastern Tennessee. The "enemy" were plantation-owning aristocrats, like Pres. Andrew Jackson and his speculator/businessmen friends. "The rich require but little legislation. We should at least occasion-

Notwithstanding, Crockett's record in three terms in Congress is unimpressive. Harriet Martineau, an English observer of the Washington scene, wrote of the range of "members of Congress, from Clay and Webster down to Davy Crockett ...." Parrington sums up: "... in four years loafing and boasting at the Congressional bar (he) had achieved some distinction as a picturesque original with the tongue of a wag."

The actual record is not quite so dismal. His first act was to petition a mail route for his district. He insisted that the Revolution required by law. He opposed the Land Bill and the War of 1812, the fledgling U. S. A. tried desperately to avoid the European conflagrations by enacting such extreme measures as the Embargo and the Non-Intercourse Acts. Cut off from trade with the continent, Americans began to manufacture many heretofore imported items. With the return to normalcy, England dumped exports at cut prices in an effort to kill the infant American industries and recapture the market. The nation responded by raising the protective tariff of 1816, which raised the price of British imports above the American cost of production, the tax providing revenue for the government. However, the industry failed to develop as expected in the South, John C. Calhoun and other Southern leaders switched their position. They protested that the South was in effect subsidizing the Northern manufacturers' goods and suffered retaliatory measures against their raw materials, exports to England. This bitter dispute resulted in a serious challenge to the Union—"the South Carolina Nullification Act, which claimed a state's rights were sovereign and that it could disregard federal legislation.

Another hot issue was Davy Crockett's pet cause—cheap land. On his third day the new Congressman introduced the Tennessee Land Bill. The state held large acreages under the provisions of the Old Northwest Ordinance, to be sold for educational purposes. Crockett argued that land should be given to those who had cleared it and built on it. The most squatters could not afford to bid at auction for the land they already occupied, and the improvements they had made would only raise the price. A land survey was required by law. In the past surveyors had charged outrageous prices and then taken the land in lieu of the unpaid fee. Furthermore, Crockett pointed out, most of his people would never have use colleges to be built in the eastern part of the state. Crockett assailed "State speculation" in land and warned of a "swindling machine."

Thus he was inevitably thrown into conflict with the political power that centered in the mature settlements of eastern Tennessee. The "enemy" were plantation-owning aristocrats, like Pres. Andrew Jackson and his speculator/businessmen friends. "The rich require but little legislation. We should at least occasion-

Along with the other Jacksonians Crockett represented John Quincy Adams's deal with Henry Clay's Whigs which deprived "old Hickory" of the presidency in 1824, although he had received the largest number of popular votes. Crockett voted against the 1828 "Tariff of Abominations." In The Lion of the West Pauilson seems to inject this issue into the dialogue with no purpose other than to call forth another flamboyant speech as by Wildfire. Actually, this subject was very much on people's minds in 1831.

Just as the Americans had to fight for their political independence and were fighting a war of words for their cultural independence, so they were also battling for economic independence. The tariff was a weapon in that war, but different sections of the country differed on strategy. During the period between the Revolution and the War of 1812, the fledgling U. S. A.
with Jackson over curbing the powers of the privately-owned Bank of the U.S. to expand or contract the economy by printing money. Debt-ridden Davy and his farmers wanted a cheap money policy so that they could pay back their loans in inflation-debased dollars.

About this time the Whig Party, desperately casting about for a picturesque, authentic Westerner in whom they could cast appeals to the "coonskin voters," began to court the disenfranchised Congressman from Tennessee. They offered help with his speeches, published larger-than-life accounts of his exploits, pointed out the honesty and intelligence, and even composed a Davy Crockett march. There are some indications that Paulding's The Lion of the West and The Kentuckian were part of the build-up.

In 1835 the Whigs arranged a triumphant tour of the Northeast. There were meetings and dinners with important businessmen and influential politicians like Daniel Webster. Everywhere Davy went, crowds gathered to applaud his speeches enthusiastically. He was overwhelmed with gifts, such as a suit of American wool and a dozen cannisters of the best sportsman's gunpowder from Du Pont; there is even evidence of loans from Nicholas Biddle, President of the Bank of the U.S., Jackson's bitter enemy.12

The Whig press covered his activities, enthusiastically enlarging on his anecdotes and witty responses. Newspaper and journal clipings became popular books, largely ghost-written, so which Crockett gave his name. "Davy was vastly surprised at his sudden fame to fame. He had never realized how great a man he was; but he accepted it as an agreeable fact and went ahead."13

In this atmosphere Davy recanted his opposition to high tariffs. His factory visits convinced him that jobs and national economic independence were at stake. At the same time he affirmed his support for "internal improvements," the foundation of the Whig platform. Jackson had attacked internal improvements as "pork barrel" legislation catering to sectional interests, but Crockett knew that frontier men, as well as eastern businessmen, needed roads, canals, rivers made navigable, and the new railroads.

This embracing of the Whig platform is not the "sell-out" it seems. Crockett's central concern was still cheap land. He also believed his constituents would benefit from internal improvements. The latter cost money. Fee land would lessen tax revenues. In those days before the income tax, the Federal government had two main sources of income—tariff duties and monies from the sale of public lands. Therefore, realistically, he came out for a high protective tariff which would swell federal coffers and enable the government to give away land cheaply while paying for internal improvements.

He defiantly made a final break with the President. "Look at my neck," he said, as he had done many times before, "you will not find there any collar, with the engraving MY DOG—ANDREW JACKSON."

He lent his name to a scurrilous biography of Martin Van Buren, Jackson's hand-picked successor. To sell his quicksands individualism in refusing to dance to Jackson's tune, he never seems to have realized that Whig politicians were cynically parading him as a puppet. They used all the means at their disposal to build up the Davy Crockett myth, even as today men like David Garth create political images in slick advertising and public relations campaigns.

In the end his Eastern friends deserted Crockett on the vote for cheap land and dumped him when the voters rejected him as a turncoat. Crockett always maintained that he had remained a Jacksonian; it was Jackson who had betrayed the principles and interests of the frontier. His monomaniacal cause had become on the subject that he declared the voters could go to hell and he would go to Texas.

At loose ends, at the age of 49, Crockett put on his old buckskin hunting shirt and coonskin cap, shouldered his rifle, and set out for Texas. Great events were in the offing there, and he obviously hoped the push for Texas independence and its ultimately successful Union would put him into a leading role. In February 1836 he selected a new homestead and then hastened off to assist in the defense of the Alamo.

Davy's tragic flaw, the same stubborn individualism which barred compromise, led to his death. A fight between Jacksonians and anti-Jacksonians left Sam Houston with some insubordinate field commanders. Among them was Col. William B. Travis, in charge of the Alamo. Judging the fort to be indefensible, Houston ordered that it be blown up and its forces join him. Travis refused to acknowledge Houston's authority. The 184 defenders of the Alamo were massacred by Santa Anna's troops. There was not been ample time to escape or, later, to surrender, but Travis, Jim Bowie, and Crockett chose victory or death. They got both.

"Remember the Alamo!" became a rallying cry to unite the Texans and carry them to their ultimate victory over the Mexican forces.

Present-day Americans will find some aspects of Crockett's career unattractive. There are many anti-black jokes and references in his writings and reputation. At various times he owned slaves. Toward Indians he was ruthless. During the Creek War, he said, "We shot them like dogs." In his autobiography he straightforwardly tells of an incident where troops set fire to a house with 46 warriors, and the next day they ate potatoes from the cellar stewed in Indian oil. Perhaps this is not shocking from a man whose grandparents had been killed by Indians, whose uncle was hanged, and another, a deaf-mute, kidnapped and held captive for 20 years. His brother lived on the edge of civilization in constant fear of attack. Nevertheless, he did vote against removal of all Indians to the far side of the Mississippi, but critics have suggested this was a result less of pity than of his unrelenting anti-Jacksonianism.

Conservationists will be offended by the reckless waste of forests and wildlife. Records show that Davy, the prodigious hunter, killed 105 bears in one season. Another time he killed six deer in one day, leaving two hanging in the woods while chasing other game. Unthinkable numbers of turkeys, pigeons, buffalo, and other game vanished before the guns of the hunters, much to the anguish of the Indians, who incorporated a reverence for nature's gifts into their religion.

Fortified by tales of exploits that grew taller with the passage of time, the Davy Crockett myth lived on. In the 1950's the legend became larger than life again. The Davy Crockett hysteria swept the country. The epic stories were resurrected for movies, comic books, newspapers, magazines, and television—and some new ones were created. Children marched with toy rifles singing, "Da-vee, . . . DAVID McCROCKETT
...DAVY CROCKETT

Da-vie Crockett, king of the wild frontier," Industry churned out a flood of "buckskin" and "loonie-span" suits and pajamas, coonskin caps, toys, and souvenirs.

In Parrington's evaluation, "Davy was a good deal of a wag, and the best joke he ever played he played upon posterity that has swallowed the myth whole and persists in setting up a romantic halo on his coonskin cap."

Other historians have been kinder. Davy Crockett was an original. He was his own man—courageous, naive perhaps, but true to his fiercely democratic principles. His slogan, "Be always sure you're right—then go ahead," has inspired many. He opened up a rich vein of American humor later mined by Mark Twain. But more important, he has remained a beloved American figure because his life was intertwined with so many major themes of our past—conquering the wilderness, fighting Indians, sectional interest that inexorably led to the Civil War, the annexation of Texas and Manifest Destiny. He has become the personification of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis of the overriding significance of the frontier in American history.


The inhabitants of what is aptly styled "The Great West" constitute a species of men of a most racy and peculiar character...

Equally uncorrupted by luxurious indulgence and undebased by abject poverty; equally exempt from the burden of hopeless toil and the temptations of perpetual idleness; equally free from the shackles of despotism and the license of anarchy; equally master of body and mind; accustomed from their youth, and from generation to generation, to a broadness of action and contemplation almost without limit or circumscription;—the faculties of the American People operate on a scale of which the masses of other countries, cramped and cribbed as they are in one little circle of unvaried, unrewarded labor, can form no conception whatever. The Americans feel that they have subdued a world with the rifle, the axe, and the plough; and the recollection of the past is to them the mirror of the future... The Mississippi boatman as he floats lazily down the stream, as like as not is anticipating the period when he will become commander of a steamboat, member of Congress, or founder of a State.

THE LION OF THE WEST: A TEXT FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

Gerald E. Warshaver

James H. Hackett was an actor who established his reputation as a monologist who could deliver comic monologues in regional dialect. When he decided he needed a new vehicle for his talents, he induced James Kirke Paulding to send him a dramatic sketch, suggesting to him the title of both the drama and the hero. When the play opened in New York, Hackett had the new role he sought, and America had found herself a new comic symbol of her national identity.

Paulding's Place in American Literature

Hackett's decision to solicit material from Paulding stemmed from the latter's remembrance as an author interested in the creation of an original American literature. Paulding had first demonstrated his comic abilities in 1807, when, along with Washington Irving, he coauthored the famous Salmagundi papers, a series of broad but witty articles satirizing the fashionable scenes and dandies of New York.

Paulding distinguished himself in the war of words which American writers fought with their former colonial rulers. Begun at the end of the War of Independence and lasting for over a century, this literary war represented America's war of intellectual independence. Suffering from the ambivalent identity characteristic of intellectuals of newly liberated colonies, American writers felt themselves to be morally superior to the defeated imperial power, but at the same time they saw themselves as culturally inferior—provincial.

English travelers who visited the new nation and returned home to publish negative reports provided Americans with an opportunity to overcome the anxiety which their contradictory self-image produced. Because these patronizing Britons combined hostile criticisms of American cultural achievements with insufferable attacks on republican American national character, learning, and literature could be attacked as being as illegitimate as was English Antagonism toward the principles of democracy. For example, the fault that English visitors found with the alterations and additions that Americans had made in the English language could be read as an attack on national sovereignty. "Every nation," wrote Paulding, "ought to have a dialect at least somewhat distinct from all others, as proof of independence." In fact, he argued, "We shall never be truly independent, I am afraid, till we make our own books, and coin our own words—two things as necessary to national sovereignty as making laws and coining money." In the context of the literary war, Nimrod Wildfire's Americanism "Wake, snakes—June bugs are cummin!" declared our linguistic exfluntified's and catawampus's, his rip stayer boasts, his backwoods epithets and half horse, half alligator similes—these coinages proved that just as America had wrested the land from England so had she tetotaciously subdued the mother country's language. The right of Americans to claim...
A TEXT FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

Paulding Defends the National Character

Paulding defended the national character and democracy of America in five major works and in numerous lesser pieces which he wrote between 1812 and 1825. His major effort in the controversy, John Bull in America, or, The New Munchausen (1825), is of interest to the student of The Lion of the West because it offers a broad caricature of the foreign traveler in America, not unlike the portrait of Mrs. Wollope in The Lion of the West. Of similar interest to the student of this play are the phrases which Amos Herold, Paulding's biographer, considers to be "keynotes" of John Bull in America. Herold finds in terms such as "spitting, gouging, drinking, duelling, dirking, swearing, strutting republicans," and the "splitting, gouging, drinking, duelling," are put into the mouth of foreign writers to characterize the type of American which Nimrod Wildfire means to represent. Clearly then, by 1830 both the hero Wildfire, and his protagonist Mrs. Wollope (Trollope) were veterans of the battle of words between England and America. In other words, they were stock types, symbolic entities.

English versus American:

(1) National Character & Language

By the time Hackett took the stage as Wildfire, Americans had grown accustomed to satirizing the negative stereotypes of themselves which outsiders held. Seen from a nationalistic perspective, the elements which hostile critics put down as proof of the fallen state of the American national character could be raised up as elements of a unique national identity. The joke in The Lion of the West was that English visitors were unable to recognize the genuine American when they saw him; instead they took an American "original" for an inferior version of themselves. Furthermore, to compound the humor, foreign visitors were shown to be so preoccupied with their own aristocratic prejudices that they misinterpreted other aspects of American culture. Nimrod could their criticisms of slavery be if, as is shown in the case of Mrs. Wollope, they addressed a "free gentleman of color" as "my good slave." By the same token, their criticisms of Americans as overly materialistic or as childish primitives reduced to a state of savagery by prolonged contact with a wilderness environment, could be negated by lampooning their frame of reference. This was done by having Jenkins and Mrs. Wollope use laughable classical allusions derived from the dead past of antithetical civilizations while Nimrod uses homespun, native allusions taken from American nature. For example, Jenkins is made to say "By all the snakes on the head of Medusa" and Mrs. Wollope is made to declare that Nimrod is a "modern centaur," while the hero, who can quote Shakespeare when he wants to, declares himself to possess the brute strength and natural cunning of both the horse and alligator combined with the elemental power of the earthquake. That Mrs. Wollope misinterprets Wildfire's metaphorical title of "horse" to mean an "officer of the cavalry" only proves that she is too overcivilized and abstract to understand the American national spirit.

The Tall Tale

Most importantly, this inability to appreciate the true identity of the American genius is underlined by Mrs. Wollope's mistakes. In Wildfire's tall tale about the hat-in-the-Kentucky-mud for an authentic anecdote, fact and fiction, truth and falsity are confused in the tall tale. Its duplicitous style of delivery, its artfully heaped up series of "Cocktail" exaggerations, and its protestations of truth make this perennially popular form of American folklore an appropriate emblem for the patronizing outsider's erroneous evaluation of America.

(2) Civilization

In The Lion of the West false belief is consistently portrayed as a feminine characteristic - exemplified with the overcivilized artificiality, essential hypocrisy, and undemocratic standards of the mother country. For example, Mrs. Wollope misinterprets the potential interest that her American audience has in "Factual representation at 500 dollars a share" will have for Americans. She is led astray because of her belief in the ethic of ascribed status, the concept that birth and breeding determined a person's place in the civic order. Even American women are not immune to this European disease. The play points out that just as Mrs. Wollope fell for Wildfire's tall tale, so Mrs. Freeman, whose name suggests she should know better, falls for Jenkins' artifice. Corrupted by foreign notions of artificial distinctions, Mrs. Freeman prefers the impostor's noble title to the talents and good nature of Percival. She wishes to better her daughter artificially in the European manner.

(3) The Uncorrupted Intellect

Wildfire is the polar opposite of European refinement. In formal proportions, he exemplifies the virile belief which, as John William Ward has shown, coalesced around the figure of Andrew Jackson. Wildfire comes from the new-created West where overcivilized refinements have not debilitated his native intelligence. As he informs us, his horse sense tells him that the lettered learning of lawyers makes them all mouth, like catfish. His intellect remains uncorrupted by formal training in logic or the other unnecessary adornments of intellect associated with the effete luxuries of Europe which Mrs. Wollope's proposed academy symbolizes. Therefore, it can be said of Wildfire as it was said of Jackson when he ran for President against Adams that his wisdom was uncorrupted by learning, but founded in the reason by understanding. His tariff speech proves this. In a burlesque of Jacksonian rhetoric, Wildfire declares that he is a "nursling of the wilds" whose unfettered natural energies and "hearty self-reliance" ("there's no mistake in me") instinctively give him the wisdom to choose the right course. The material development of nineteenth century America needed a philosophy less than it needed action, but satisfied both needs by developing a philosophy of action, Ward observes. Wildfire's tariff speech is a grotesque enlargement of this primitivist philosophy. It held that the uncorrupted "heart uses far better than the head." It makes thought subordinate to action.

Nothing could be more illustrative of this...
philosophy than the way Wildfire became a Congressman. As a gigantic personification of the ethic of democratic equality, Wildfire literally gets down in the mud with the boatman. His long tale underlines the belief in the "dynamic relation between physical nature and human character" which Ward considers a hallmark of the Jacksonian attitude. And, as Wildfire's introduction to his fight tale makes clear, the point of his narrative is that he proved he was the best man--"the yaller flower of the forest," a true "beauty"--in a fight conducted according to nature's rules. Repudiating the artificial rules of the European gentleman, the half horse, half alligator crew of the west called for every man to make his own way up in the world--"Old Mississippi style."

Wildfire's Influence on the Crockett Myth

Historians have correctly noted that the figure of Wildfire suggests the career and reputation of Davy Crockett, the backwoods militia colonel from Tennessee who came to Congress in 1827.

Davy Crockett's
IS ALMANACK, 37
OF WILD SPORTS IN THE WEST.
Life in the Backwoods, & Sketches of Times.

Documentary evidence shows that Paulding had the specific character of Crockett in mind when he composed his play. While historians and critics have written about the importance of Davy Crockett as a model for Nimrod Wildfire, much less has been said about the contribution Paulding's sketch made to the image of Crockett. Students of the play would do well to follow the lead of the folklorist Joseph Arpad who found that Wildfire's monologue of his fight with the riverboatman was a revised version of a tale Paulding first recorded in his Letters from the South, a work he published in 1817. As Arpad demonstrates, this satire on Jacksonian campaigning became a feature of the Crockett legend. Similarly, Wildfire's tariff speech was also subsequently put into the mouth of Crockett by the builders of little myth. The contribution the play made to the popular conception of the backwoodsman extends beyond the tales, however. Indeed, as Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill note, "Wildfire's most peculiar phases had brief histories or no histories at all before 1830, the year of the play."

Afterwards, as research will show, they became commonplace expressions of western folk speech.

The Backwoodsman and the American Myth

Crockett, however, is not the only historical figure who ought to be associated with the character of Wildfire. The rhapsody of the backwoodsman pulls us back to the earlier figure of Daniel Boone. Apotheosized as early as 1784 as "the free-lance frontiersman, ordained by God to settle the wilderness," years before he answered Hackett's advertisement, Boone had struck Paulding as the personification of unleashed American energy. In 1817 Paulding showed he shared in the myth of Daniel Boone by boasting that his fellow Kentuckians could "march to the north pole and shoot out the wind's eye, if it were no bigger than the point of a needle." This boast, of course, ought to remind us of the type of brag characteristic of the "screamer" played by Hackett. As Richard Slotkin argues in Regeneration Through Violence, by 1833 Americans had come to regard Boone as the archetype of a new species of man--the westerner. "A Nimrod by instinct and physical character," this new type of American according to Timothy Flint's Indian Wars of the West, mixed "wild recklessness" with "high notions of honor and generosity." It is likely therefore, that in looking for a new role for himself Hackett fused the myth of Boone, the Kentucky Nimrod, with the celebrity of Crockett, the Jacksonian Wildfire. The result was Nimrod Wildfire, not an historical figure but an element in the story which Americans told about themselves in order to give dramatic character to their subjective interpretation of themselves.

In conclusion, this short play covers more ground than may appear at first view. It is historically multidimensional. It moves backwards in time. It lightly sums up an episode which seriously affected the American psyche--the literary war between England and America. Most importantly of all, the concepts with which The Lion of the West deals remain important aspects of American culture. For instance, in the prototypical western novel The Virginian (1902), Owen Wister put the backwoodsman on horseback and brought the opposition of reason/understanding, nature/civilization, masculine/feminine, and east (Europe/west (America) onto the plains of Wyoming. Closer to our own day is the case of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Pilled with the mythic idealization of the cowboy, highly skilled in the practice of the western tall tale, campaigning in 1964 like "Andy Jackson in a jetliner," Lyndon B. Johnson brought the spirit of The Lion of the West into the White House. If as Clifford Geertz suggests, "the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts," then Paulding's little verse is a good source for a closer reading of the American identity. From LBJ to the western heroes we see on television and in the movies, from Mark Twain's characters to the Davy Crockett legends, from the last English traveler to report on our manners and the state of our republicanism to Mrs. Trollope and her predecessors, from the myth of Daniel Boone to the image of John Wayne, and from 1830 to today, it has been acted and reenacted.
Early Nineteenth-Century America offered many obvious features of a Heroic Age—a half-known wilderness where men were threatened by untamed animals and hostile tribes—and it is not surprising that there soon appeared American counterparts of the ancient heroes. The uncertainties of national boundaries and aspirations and language, and the unsure line between fact and hope, had their counterparts in uncertain boundaries between the heroic and the comic. Our first popular heroes came on the scene to a chorus of horse-laughs.

American humor and American popular heroes were born together. The first popular heroes of the new nation were the antics of its heroic clowns. The comic and the heroic were mixed and combined in novel American proportions. What were the dominant themes of these mock-heroics? What made them comic, and what made them heroic?

The heroic themes are obvious enough and much different from those of other times and places. The Crockett legends, as Richard W. Dorson has explained, repeat the familiar pattern of the Old World heroic story: "the preeminence of a mighty hero whose fame in myth has a tenuous basis in fact; single combats in which he distinguishes himself against dread antagonists both man and beast; vows and boastings; pride of the hero in his weapons, his horse, his dog, his woman; the remarkable birth and precocious strength of the hero; a tragic death in which the invincible but mortal champion is treacherously or unnaturally slain." Achilles, Beowulf, Siegfried, Roland, and King Arthur—each in his own time and place—relived the familiar heroic role.

In a world full of the unexpected, where all norms were vaguely or extravagantly defined, readers of the Crockett legends were never quite certain whether to laugh or to applaud, whether what they saw and heard was wonderful, awful or ridiculous. What? wrote Crockett, "you'll laugh at me, and not at my book." In a more fully explored, better known, more predictable world, they would have been more certain of the meaning of what they saw and of the reactions they should express. Crockett's boastings were not entirely distinguishable from the honest optimism of the booster, from the blatant lies of the land-promoter, or from the common hopefulness of the flâneur. Even today, when we are fascinated by the spectacle of the American superman of that age, we are seldom sure why. Are we admiring the beautiful, the grand, the big, or the ugly?

The vastness and variety and freshness of the American landscape, of its flora and fauna, of custom and costume, nourished American subliterature... It is only a half-truth, therefore, to speak of American humor and American heroics in this period as "regional."... Their wider comic and heroic appeal, and their place as national legend, finally came from the fact that there was a large audience of fellow Americans remote from those scenes that was eager for entertainment and for sagas to dramatize the distinctive appeal and grandeur of their whole country. Regional distinctions themselves thus made possible a flourishing national subliterature.
of honour and integrity, treachery and falsehood almost beguiled them, in their intercourse with the unhappy Indians. It is impossible for any mind of common honesty not to be revolted by the contradictions in their principles and practice. [You will see them with one hand hoisting the cap of liberty, and with the other flogging their slaves. You will see them one hour lecturing their mob on the indefeasible rights of man, and the next driving from their homes the children of the soil, whom they had bound themselves to protect by the most solemn treaties.

"Young Girls and Young Marriages" (p. 118)

...even the young girls, though often with lovely features, look pale, thin, and haggard. The horror of domestic service, which the reality of slavery, and the fable of equality, have generated, excludes the young women from that pure and most comfortable resource of decent English girls; and the consequence is, that with a most irreverent freedom of manner to the parents, the daughters present, to the full extent of the word, domestic slaves. This condition, which no periodical merrymaking, no village fête, ever occurs to cheer, is only changed for the still sadder burdens of a teeming wife. The slender, childish thing, without vigour of mind or body, is made to stem a sea of troubles that dims her young eye and makes her cheek grow pale, even before nature has given it the last beautiful finish of the full-grown woman.

"Equality" (pp. 120-21)

Any man's son may become the equal of any other man's son, and the consciousness of this is certainly a spur to exertion; on the other hand, it is also a spur to that coarse familiarity, untempered by any shadow of respect, which is assumed in the grosser and the lowest intercourse with the highest and most refined. This is a positive evil, and, I think, more than balances its advantages. The theory of equality may be very daintily discussed by English gentlemen in a London dining-room, when the servant, having placed a fresh bottle of cool wine on the table, respectfully shuts the door, and leaves them to their walnuts and their wine; but it will be found less palatable when it presents itself in the shape of a hard, greasy paw, and is claimed in accents that breathe less of freedom than of onions and whiskey. Strong, indeed, must be the love of equality, an English breast, if it can survive a tour through the Union.

"Treatment of Slaves" (p. 247)

...[Slavery's] effects on the moral feelings and external manners... are unquestionably most injurious. The same man who beards his wealthier and more educated neighbour with the bullying boast, "I'm as good as you," turns to his slave, and knocks him down, if the furrow he has ploughed, or the log he has felled, please not this stickler for equality. There is a glaring falsehood on the very surface of such a man's principles that is revolting. It is not among the higher classes that the possession of slaves produces the worst effects. Among the poorer class of landholders, who are often as ignorant and as obsequious as the negroes they own, the effect of this plenary power, over males and females in most degrading and the kind of course, not to say brutal, authority which is exercised, furnishes the most disgusting moral spectacle I ever witnessed.

"Theatres" (pp. 339-40)

There are three theatres at New York, all of which we visited. The Park Theatre is the only one licensed by fashion, but the Bowery is infinitely superior in beauty; it is indeed as pretty a theatre as I ever entered, perfect as to size and proportion, elegantly decorated, and the scenery and machinery equal to any in London...it requires some courage to decide upon going [to the Chatham]; nor do I think my curiosity would have penetrated so far, had I not seen Miss Mitford's Rienzi advertised there...[In] spite of very indifferent acting, I was delighted. The interest must have been great, for till the curtain fell, I saw not one quarter of the queer things around me; then I observed in that front row of a dress box a lady performing the most maternal office possible; several gentlemen without their coats, and a general air of contempt for the décories of life, certainly more than usually revolting.

"Money" (p. 301)

Nothing can exceed their activity and perseverance in all kinds of speculation, handicraft, and enterprise, which promises a profitable pecuniary result. I heard an Englishman, who had been long resident in America, declare that he had never overheard Americans conversing without the word DOLLAR being pronounced between them. Such unity of purpose, such sympathy of feeling, can, I believe, be found nowhere else, except, perhaps, in an ant's nest. The result is exactly what might be anticipated. This sordid object, for ever before the sordid tone of mind, must inevitably produce a seared and blunted conscience on all questions of probity.

"Treatment of Women" (pp. 156-57)

In America, with the exception of dancing, which is almost wholly confined to the unmarried of both sexes, all the enjoyment of the men are found in the absence of the women...Were it not that such is the custom, it is impossible but that they would have ingenuity enough to find some expedient for sparing the wives and daughters of the opulent the sordid offices of household drudgery which they almost all perform in their families. Even in the slave states, though they may not clear-starch and iron, mix puddings and cakes one-half of the day, and watch them baking the other half, still the very highest occupy themselves in their household concerns, in a manner that precludes the possibility of their becoming elegant and enlightened companions. In Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, I met with some exceptions to this; but speaking of the country generally, it is unquestionably true.
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Values:
1. What moral and cultural values of the characters are in conflict in the play?
2. What value do you think Paulding was implying through the play?
3. In what ways do you think Paulding make some of the characters seem ridiculous and in what ways not?
4. In what ways do you, as a modern audience with different attitudes toward women and blacks, view the play’s treatment of Mrs. Wollope? of Caesar? of Nimrod? of the Freemans?
5. What do you think were the values of the original audience, and how do these compare with our own?
6. Why did Davy Crockett encourage the rumor that Nimrod was modeled on him?
7. Why was the play a big hit in New York and London but disliked out West?
8. What was the societal effect, so far as we can tell, of this play’s success?
9. Compare the treatment of the western hero in this play to that in Arthur Kopit’s The Great Grandson and John Bishop’s The Great Grandson of Jedediah Kohler. (In the latter play, the modern descendant of the mythic western hero, Jedediah Kohler, says of his ancestor, “But he was on the wrong side!” What do you think this means?)
10. What kind of a mythic hero is Nimrod?
11. How would a mythic western hero you invented differ from Nimrod Wildfire?

Structure:
1. In what ways is the play representative of nineteenth century comedy? In what respects is it a genuine original?
2. What can you learn about the nineteenth century theatre by comparing the plots of the play’s three versions?
3. Can you compare this play to Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night? Why?
4. Show how the language used by the principals helps to characterize them.
5. In dramatic theory, characters in similar positions whose personalities are contrasted by the dramatist are called “dramatic foils.” (The term is derived from fencing.) Which characters serve as foils to which others?
6. How does Bernard relate the main plot to the subplot?
7. Why do we never worry about the possibility of Jenkins being killed in the duel?

Production:
1. In your imagination, how did you cast the characters?
2. The play calls for two quite spectacular scenes, the party, and the duel-kidnapping scene which are difficult to technically execute. How would you stage those scenes?
3. After reading the play, what do you think is the basis for Nimrod’s “mis-reading” of Mrs. Wollope’s letter?
4. If you could pick any well-known actors for the parts, how would you cast this play? costume it? stage it?
5. How much of the humor comes from the divergent accents? Try the dialogue with and without, and see.

Americans: Then and Now:
1. Would Mrs. Wollope’s Academy have fulfilled a need in America?
2. Why do you think Mrs. Wollope/Trollope was so devastatingly negative about life in the U. S. A.? Assess the validity of her views.
3. Mrs. Freeman terms Wildfire “a disgrace.” Do you agree?
4. As a Congressman, Nimrod Wildfire had been exposed to the Civilizing influence of Washington society, yet he retains the speech and manners of a raw frontiersman. Why?
5. Compare Mrs. Trollope’s view of America with those of two French observers of roughly the same period—J. H. St. John Trollope and Alexis de Tocqueville. Also with the later writings of Charles Dickens and her own son Anthony Trollope.
7. Why did the Whigs cultivate Davy Crockett and shape his legend?
8. Why is there so much disagreement about the true character of Davy Crockett?
9. Compare today’s election campaign procedures with those of Davy Crockett’s times.
10. The frontier in the play is Kentucky. How was the concept of it changed in American thought?
11. The tariff question continues to be an important issue. Today the American auto, electronics, steel, and other industries protest Japanese imports; shoe manufacturers demand action against Brazil, Italy, and Taiwan; the clothing industry cites its losses because of foreign competition. Should a tax be placed on imports to protect domestic producers? Should certain industries be protected in the interests of national defense and welfare?
12. Do you think political image-making is easier today than it was in the 1830’s? Can you give modern examples of manipulation by the press of a public figure?
13. Could you tell the story of Davy Crockett from his wife’s point-of-view?
14. How is the cheap money question being resolved today?
15. Does Nimrod Wildfire/Davy Crockett fit your idea of the quintessential American?
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GLOSSARY

Note on "backwoods lingo" in The Lion of the West:
Tall talk is language that makes a noise; it's intensive and extravagant. "To the freedoms they already enjoyed," observes Nody Boatright in Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949), p. 146. "The folk of the West added another—the freedom to use language freely." The Lion of the West contains several examples of the "free speech" of the frontier movement. These terms, like other lawless coinages of backwoods slang, had some basis in western usages. However, writers who popularized the figure of the backwoodsman for eastern audiences most likely built upon western usage. The Nimrod Wildfires and Davy Crockett's stories have long been the subject of debate. The comic press spoke an extra thick version of the backwoods lingo in order to intensify and exaggerate the social distance between themselves and their eastern audiences.

The following coinages appear in The Lion of the West:
Catawumpus: a term associated with terror and mayhem.
Exflunctified: totally crushed, demolished, or beaten.

sodologer or soidologer: a fierce sock or a terrible wallop.
Jubus: a variation of juberos, dubious, doubtful.

... Were the words in these stories really words? Gullywhumping, slantendicler, discomberate, abusquatulate, homologification, circumbustifakashun, flutterbation. Elegancies? Illiteracies? How much of all was a hoax?

Daniel J. Boorstin

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"Scene from The Contrast, Harvard Theatre Collection, p. 2."
"James Hackett as Nimrod Wildfire, Harvard Theatre Collection, p. 9.
"David Crockett, frontispiece, Shackford, David Crockett, the Man and the Legend (Chapel Hill, 1961), p. 15.
"Unidentified artist, Davy Crockett, woodcut. From Davy Crockett Almanac, 1837, p. 20.

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