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Old West, New West, Postwest, Real West

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When western American literature first showed up in eastern periodicals, it offered itself as a different kind of writing from the national norm. Similarly, students of western literature have usually been out of step with the rest of literary academia; like much of the literature they study, a kind of jaunty impertinence — simultaneously grandiose and defensive — has marked their

work from the beginning. In the decades when the field emerged, the overwhelming popularity of formula westerns in print and on screen made it marginal to the study of high art. Myth study gave popular materials enough legitimacy for westernists to claim that their field deserved serious consideration, but by 1987, when the Western Literature Association brought out its *Literary History of the American West (LHAW)*, the academic market in criticism had moved elsewhere. The preface...

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