



Art and Politics in Have Gun--Will Travel: The 1950s Television Western as Ethical Drama

Kathleen L. Spencer

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From 1955 to 1964, American television was awash in adult Westerns, accounting for as much as one quarter of all prime-time programming. During its six seasons (1957-1963), Have Gun-Will Travel was recognized as one of the best shows on television--politically the most liberal, and intellectually and aesthetically the most sophisticated, largely due to the influence of its star, Richard Boone. This work places the series in its larger historical context, exploring why the Western was so popular in this decade, and examines how the early history of television as a medium and a business shaped the shows that were produced. A brief biography of Boone is included, revealing how his values and experiences shaped the series. Behind-the-scenes life on the show is compared with that of its longest-running and most popular competitors, Gunsmoke, Wagon Train and Bonanza. Major themes and patterns of the show are analyzed and compared with those of competing shows, in particular the figures of the lawman, the gunfighter and the outlaw, racial and ethnic minorities, and women.

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