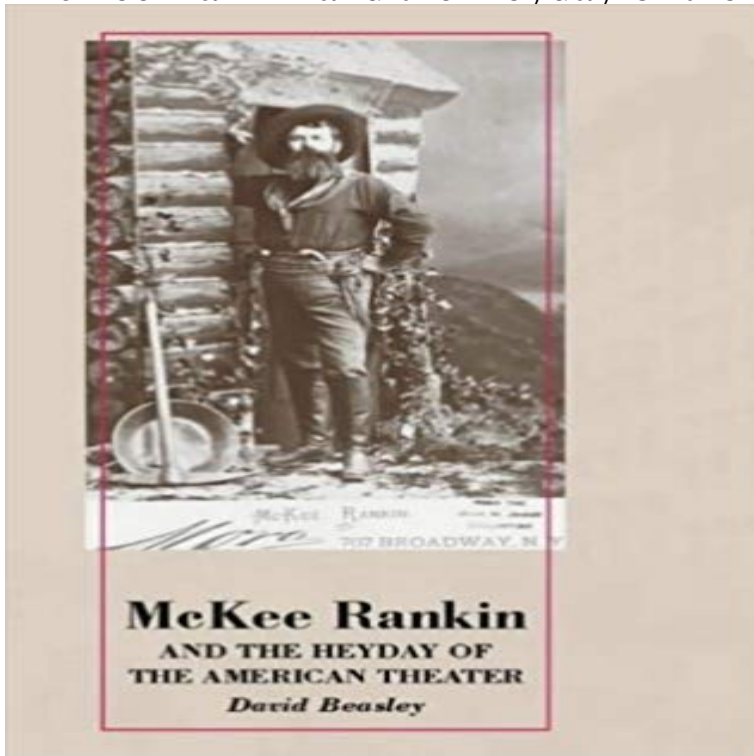


## McKee Rankin and the Heyday of the American Theater



McKee Rankin burst upon the theater world in the 1860s. By the age of twenty-one, Rankin, a Canadian by birth, had become leading man at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia, considered to be the best theater in the country. A matinee idol and a superb character actor, he formed one of the first combination companies to tour America. He wrote successful Western dramas, in which he and his wife, the famous Kitty Blanchard, created unforgettable characters. He built a theater in New York City and one in San Francisco where, in the 1880s, he created a nationally famous repertory theater. Persevering, intelligent, and dedicated, his passion for the theater brought him into conflict with the commercial attitudes of managers. Throughout his ups and downs, from riches to poverty, from handsome man to obese alcoholic, he continued to create great roles. When Rankin died in 1914, the brilliant innovations of this actor-manager, playwright, and director had changed theater forever. This thoroughly documented biography is also a lively story of one of the most important, but least known, periods of American theater, encompassing a wealth of information about great but forgotten actors, a fascinating account of the relationship between the stage and its audience, and several rediscovered, once famous, plays. Students of acting, historians of the theater, and those interested in the cultural development of a continent will find the book invaluable. All readers will be entranced by a world from which today's entertainment emerged.

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