

LOCAL COLOR WRITING

Style of writing derived from the presentation of the features and peculiarities of a particular locality and its inhabitants. The name is given especially to a kind of American literature that in its most characteristic form made its appearance just after the Civil War and for nearly three decades was the single most popular form of American literature, fulfilling a newly awakened public interest in distant parts of the country and, for some, providing a nostalgic memory of times gone by. It concerned itself mainly with depicting the character of a particular region, concentrating especially upon the peculiarities of dialect, manners, folklore, and landscape that distinguish the area. The frontier novels of [James Fenimore Cooper](#) have been cited as precursors of the local colour story, as have the New York Dutch tales of [Washington Irving](#). The California Gold Rush provided a vivid and exciting background for the stories of [Bret Harte](#), whose "[The Luck of Roaring Camp](#)" (1868), with its use of miners' dialect, colourful characters, and Western background, is among the early local colour stories.

Harte was not the only local colourist to begin as a humorist. His unavailing efforts to solicit quality writing for the *Overland Monthly* eventually led him to simply mock with overblown verse the mentality of the uncritical western writers. His lead in the satiric vein was followed by a number of men—George Horatio Derby and the master of dialect spelling, Robert Henry Newell, among them. Other writers of the "Old Southwest" (i.e., Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and later Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana) joined in the satirical, broadly humorous style. Samuel Clemens, later known as [Mark Twain](#), apprenticed with Harte during this period. His adaptation of the local colour story—and the humorist subgenre—to the tall tale and life on the Mississippi River make his antecedents clear.

Many well-known authors first achieved success with vivid descriptions of their own localities: [Harriet Beecher Stowe](#), [Rose Terry Cooke](#), and [Sarah Orne Jewett](#) wrote of New England; [George Washington Cable](#), [Joel Chandler Harris](#), and [Kate Chopin](#) described the Deep South; [Thomas Nelson Page](#) romanticized Virginia plantation life; [Lafcadio Hearn](#), before he began his Japanese adventures, wrote of New Orleans; [Edward Eggleston](#) wrote of Indiana frontier days; [Mary Noailles Murfree](#) told stories of the Tennessee mountaineers; and [O. Henry](#) was a brilliant chronicler of both the Texas frontier and the streets of New York City. Among the many writers who inherited and drew upon the local colour traditions may be numbered [Willa Cather](#), [William Faulkner](#), and [Grace Paley](#).