

Regionalism

Regional writing is basically realistic literature that gives a strong feeling for a particular place or region. Some literary scholars distinguish between regional writing and local color writing. Regional writing is written by an insider who grew up in the region (e.g. Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), local color writing is produced by writers who visited the region and highlighted what struck them as picturesque (e.g. Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"). Both regional and local color writing are instances of literary realism: the narratives are set in contemporary time, the action is plausibly motivated, the speech (often in dialect) is that of the common people. The places are described with great fidelity of detail. By the end of the century virtually every region of the country, from Maine to California, had its „local colorist“ or „regionalist“ who captured its distinctive natural, social and linguistic features.

West was a region of adventure. The region was settled by frontiersmen and during the Gold Rush in California more and more adventurers came here. One genre typical for this region is *tall tale*. These stories existed in oral tradition, were humorous, told in dialect, and gave the picture of the social life of the frontier.

Mark Twain (1835-1910), lived for several years in Nevada and California, there he got acquainted with „tall tale“. Twain absorbed this tradition and drew inspiration from this genre when writing his short stories.

Roughing It – a novel, fictionalized form of Twain's western adventures

Bret Harte (1836-1902), lived in California, wrote short stories set in California gold-mining camps, e.g. „The Luck of Roaring Camp“, „The Outcasts of Poker Flat“

New England was a region with Puritan heritage. After the Civil War people moved to big towns and the region experienced a huge industrial development. Immigration and a rise of nouveaux riches altered the character of both upper and lower classes. Regional writers focused mainly on describing the vanishing features of the country, that is nature and the lives of ordinary country people.

Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) was born in Maine and in her writings recorded the life of little farms and deserted harbors.

A Country Doctor – a novel about a New England girl who refuses marriage so as to become a doctor

The Country of the Pointed Firs – a collection of short stories and sketches of a Maine seaport town

Mary Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930) was born in Massachusetts. In her short stories she explored the power of Puritanism, a power to destroy the emotional life. She also focused on women and their role in the society.

South was an agrarian region, and the second wave of colonists stimulated the growth of the aristocratic plantation system in which the crops of tobacco, rice and cotton were worked under the institution of slavery. Education tended to be restricted to the upper classes. Much of the area was explored and colonized by the French and Spanish, and many Spanish and French traditions survived in the South.

After the Civil War distinctive features of southern literature appeared. Southern regionalists put a greater emphasis on style, stressed the psychological insight and were fascinated with deep, emotional types.

Mark Twain wrote about the Mississippi region where he was born (novels *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*)

Kate Chopin (1850-1904) was born in Saint Louis in Missouri, at the age of 20 she married and moved to New Orleans in Louisiana, and later lived on a Louisiana cotton plantation. She wrote about the exotic world of New Orleans and about lives of Creoles (Creoles are the white French-speaking descendants of the early French and Spanish settlers).

Bayou Folk – a collection of short stories of Louisiana rural life

The Awakening – a novel about the psychological and sexual awakening of a young married woman.

The publication of the novel caused a storm of criticism, the novel was considered vulgar and morbid. Chopin was hurt by this criticism and her literary career came to an end. Chopin and her writings fell into obscurity and were rediscovered only in the second half of the 20th century.

Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) was born in Georgia into a poor family. In his teens he lived on a plantation where he worked as a printer for the owner of the plantation who published a local newspaper. While living on the plantation, Harris got acquainted with Negro folklore and decided to retell the stories narrated by black slaves. These stories are known as Uncle Remus stories. The narrator is Uncle Remus, an aged, philosophical, black storyteller and he is telling the stories to a young white boy. The stories are written in black English and are humorous.