

UNIT THREE

REALISM

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- The U.S. Civil War (1861-1865) between the industrial North and the agricultural, slave-owning South was a watershed in American history. The innocent optimism of the young democratic nation gave way, after the war, to a period of exhaustion.
- From 1860 to 1914, the United States was transformed from a small, young, agricultural ex-colony to a huge, modern, industrial nation.

Frontier Humor and Realism

Local Colorists

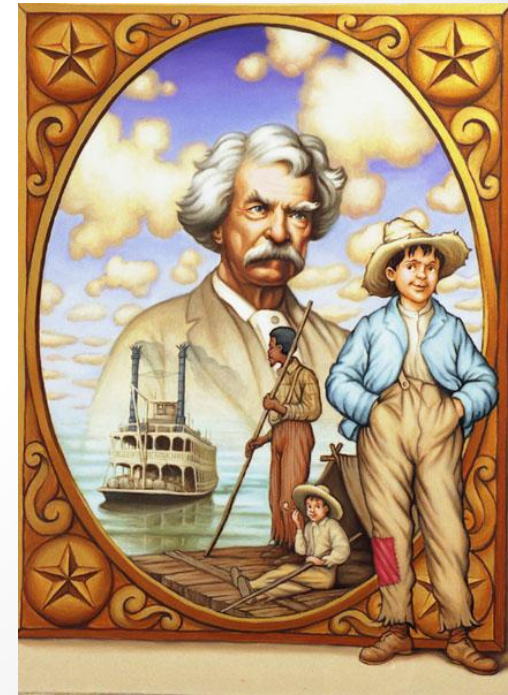
- Two major literary currents in 19th-century America merged in Mark Twain: popular frontier humor and local color, or "regionalism."
- These related literary approaches began in the 1830s -- and had even earlier roots in local oral traditions. In ragged frontier villages, on riverboats, in mining camps, and around cowboy campfires far from city amusements, storytelling flourished.

MAIN AUTHORS

- Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain)
1835-1910 “Frontier Humor and Realism”
- Bret Harte 1836-1902 “Local Colorist”

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) 1835-1910

- For Twain and other American writers of the late 19th century, realism was not merely a literary technique: It was a way of speaking truth and exploding worn-out conventions. Thus it was profoundly liberating and potentially at odds with society. The most well-known example is *Huck Finn*, a poor boy who decides to follow the voice of his conscience and help a Negro slave escape to freedom, even though Huck thinks this means that he will be damned to hell for breaking the law.



- The novel also dramatizes Twain's ideal of the harmonious community: "What you want, above all things, on a raft is for everybody to be satisfied and feel right and kind toward the others."

Bret Harte 1836-1902

- Bret Harte is remembered as the author of adventurous stories such as "The Luck of Roaring Camp" and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat".
- Outwardly realistic, he was one of the first to introduce low-life characters -- cunning gamblers, gaudy prostitutes, and uncouth robbers -- into serious literary works.

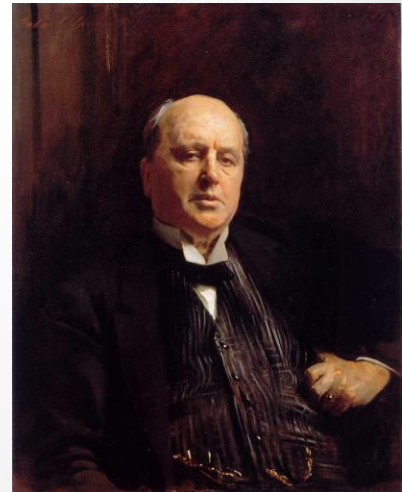


Cosmopolitan Novelists

- Henry James 1843-1916
- Edith Wharton 1862-1937

Henry James 1843-1916

- James is noted for his "international theme" -- that is, the complex relationships between native Americans and cosmopolitan Europeans.
- James's first, or "international," phase encompassed such works as *Transatlantic Sketches* (travel pieces, 1875), *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879), and a masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).



- James's second period was experimental. He exploited new subject matters -- feminism and social reform in *The Bostonians* (1886).
- In his third, or "major," phase James returned to international subjects, *The Ambassadors* (1903) (which James felt was his best novel).

Edith Wharton 1862-1937

- Like James, Wharton contrasts Americans and Europeans. The core of her concern is the gulf separating social reality and the inner self. Often a sensitive character feels trapped by unfeeling characters or social forces.
- Wharton's best novels include *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), *Summer* (1917), *The Age of Innocence* (1920), and the beautifully crafted novella *Ethan Frome* (1911).

