



Bret Harte: Opening the American Literary West (The Oklahoma Western Biographies)

Gary Scharnhorst

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Bret Harte was the best-known and highest paid writer in America in the early 1870s, yet his vexed attempts to earn a living by his pen led to the failure of his marriage and, in 1878, his departure for Europe. Gary Scharnhorst's biography of Harte traces the growing commercial appeal of western fiction and drama on both sides of the Atlantic during the Gilded Age, a development in which Harte played a crucial role.

Harte's pioneering use of California local color in such stories as "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" challenged genteel assumptions about western writing and helped open eastern papers to contributions by Mark Twain and others. The popularity of Bret Harte's writings was driven largely by a literary market that his western stories helped create.

The first Harte biography in nearly seventy years to be written entirely from primary sources, this book documents Harte's personal relationships and, in addition, his negotiations with various publishers, agents, and theatrical producers as he exploited popular interest in the American West.

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