

American Literature Association
29th Annual Conference
May 24-27, 2018
Hyatt Regency, San Francisco
William Gilmore Simms Society

Simms, Twain, and the American West: William Gilmore Simms and Mark Twain each had a fascination with and contempt for the American West that was essential to the rise of each author to prominence in American literary circles. To Simms, the West was Andrew Jackson's West: the trans-Appalachian states and territories inaccessible to any but the hardest pioneers. Simms repeatedly travelled to this West in the 1820s and used these lands as settings for his Border Romances such as *Guy Rivers* (1834), *Richard Hurdis* (1838), and *Border Beagles* (1840). As sectional conflicts that would lead to the Civil War developed, Simms became an ardent Southern patriot. Twain, on the other hand, quit the Confederate army and "lit out for the territories" allied with his Unionist brother, appointed Secretary to the Nevada Territory by President Lincoln. Twain deserted to a more distant Pacific West: Nevada, California, and what would later become the state of Hawaii. Twain's *Roughing It* chronicles his dystopian misadventures leading to his becoming a bohemian journalist, homeless and suicidal in San Francisco, followed by renewal in a chronicle of the "Kingdom of Hawaii." Returning to San Francisco, the legendary "man in the white suit" emerged, the literary celebrity who kept audiences spellbound with comical stories and cynical aphorisms. Twain's routine, however, would not have been possible without the irreverent humor of the earlier writings of Simms and his fellow antebellum humorists upon whom Twain drew both in his novels and performances. Simms and Twain would each employ different versions of the "West" in developing powerful, rich expressions of what Simms called "Americanism in literature." Essays are invited exploring this vital role of the American West in the writings of Simms and Twain.

Papers should be 20 minutes (8-10 pages) in length. Brief discussion will follow the presentations. Papers must be read in person by the author. (According to ALA guidelines, presenters may give only one paper at the conference).
Proposals should be submitted no later than **Jan 25, 2018** to

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