

The Life of Mark Twain: The Early Years, 1835-1871

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rates or chart institutional changes in St. Louis policing. But the book presents colorful portraits of a high-profile embezzlement scandal and a double murder involving visiting French noblemen.

Much like the newspapers of the era, which sought both to report local events and to promote the city, Gordon's narrative strikes a celebratory, triumphalist tone, emphasizing the "determination and resilience" of St. Louisans, even in the face of devastating crises (251). His examinations of the epidemic and the fire depict residents at their best, focusing on the heroism of prominent citizens, their unshakable faith in the future of the city, and their zeal to restore stability and rebuild St. Louis. With a keen eye for finding riveting details and selecting evocative quotations, Gordon draws skillfully from the diaries and personal papers of these residents and, in doing so, makes effective use of the rich holdings of the Missouri Historical Society. Similarly, his chapters on crime underscore the resourcefulness of local lawbreakers and the integrity of St. Louis attorneys.

In sum, *Fire, Pestilence, and Death: St. Louis, 1849* reconstructs the thrall of urban life during an unimaginably tumultuous year. Gordon's emphasis on the grit and optimism of St. Louisans is difficult to evaluate. Were residents of the Mound City more valiant and heroic than New Orleanians confronting the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 or Chicagoans dealing with the Great Fire of 1871? Other city dwellers, after all, also did not abandon major urban centers after any of these disasters. That issue aside, Gordon has skillfully captured the chaos and spirit of St. Louis during perhaps the most challenging year in its long history.

The Life of Mark Twain: The Early Years, 1835–1871, by Gary Scharnhorst. Mark Twain and His Circle. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2018. xxxi, 686 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$36.95 hardcover.

Reviewer C. Elizabeth Raymond is Grace A. Griffen Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Reno. She is the author of "Creating the Heartland: The Midwest Emerges in American Culture" in *The Midwestern Moment*, edited by Jon K. Lauck (2017).

In the first of a projected three volumes, Gary Scharnhorst offers an extremely detailed biography of the writer Samuel Clemens. This stately account assiduously follows its subject through childhood and early adventures, focusing intently on the process of literary professionalization that eventually led to the emergence in 1863 of the humorist and writer Mark Twain. The book will be of genuine interest to Twain scholars, but the very comprehensiveness that makes it valuable to academics will limit its appeal to general readers.

Given the plethora of existing scholarship on Mark Twain, a reader might be forgiven for wondering whether another biography is warranted, particularly one of such magnitude. Clearly sensitive to this question, Scharnhorst provides an explanatory prologue. He lists scores of limited Twain studies that are either thematic or chronological in their emphasis and deftly characterizes the most important single-volume biographies. He rationalizes his own immense labor by noting that no multivolume study has appeared since 1912, when Twain's authorized biographer, Albert Paine, began publishing what Scharnhorst characterizes as a "hagiography" of the famed writer (xxvi). Since then significant additional material in the form of letters, interviews, and ephemeral newspaper articles has emerged. Mark Twain remains a literary figure of note and interest, and Scharnhorst feels justified in offering an unapologetically comprehensive account of his writing life.

Somewhat curiously, given his title, Scharnhorst makes a point of referring to the author consistently as Sam Clemens rather than as Mark Twain, his adopted literary pseudonym. Choosing to document the life of a writer who "enjoys a reputation unrivaled in American literary history" yet "was in large part the architect of that reputation," his biographer resolutely insists that Twain is an invented persona who cannot be relied upon (xv). In the interest of reaching "the bedrock of biographical facts about Sam Clemens," Scharnhorst conscientiously seeks documentation for various inflated claims made by the irrepressible Twain (xxvii). As an unfortunate result, the tone of this volume often seems scolding, as if Clemens's biographer were reproaching his subject for having written fiction instead of history.

For those with sufficient leisure and interest in Twain, however, volume one amply repays the time invested to read it. It begins with the Clemens family's English antecedents and quickly arrives in Florida, Missouri, where Samuel was born in 1835. Here Scharnhorst's painstaking research is evident, as he explores father Marshall Clemens's career and unfortunate investments; the economic history of Hannibal, where the family soon moved; and the various childhood friends and incidents that Samuel Clemens later drew on in his fiction.

The Early Years is a distinctly literary history. People and places matter to the extent that they appear accurately in later Twain creations, rather than being explored as context for the ideas or development of the young Clemens. A good example is slavery. Sam Clemens's aunt and uncle owned several slaves, and he spent childhood summers on their farm listening to stories told by an enslaved African American elder known as Uncle Dan'l. Clemens claimed that the experience gave him a "strong liking for the African race," even though "color and con-

dition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of" (22). Rather than analyzing such nuances of nineteenth-century race relations in the border South, Scharnhorst disputes Clemens's representation of his own life, concluding condescendingly that "[Sam] overstated his lack of racial prejudice" and "harbored some biases for the rest of his life" (22). It is certainly true that Clemens was a product of his own time, but a literary biographer might helpfully have explained how that time differs from our own, and how the nineteenth-century experience was reflected in Twain's own writing.

Geographically, *The Early Years* is expansive, following Sam Clemens from Hannibal east to New York as a journeyman printer, south along the Mississippi River as he studied to become a river pilot, and west to the silver boom town of Virginia City, Nevada, where he learned the craft of journalism and first appeared in print as Mark Twain. Iowa readers might be intrigued to learn that Clemens's first public speech—on Benjamin Franklin—was delivered in Keokuk in 1856. A pattern of itinerancy emerged as Clemens wrote for newspapers in San Francisco that sent him to Hawaii and sponsored the 1867 expedition to Europe and the Middle East that was transformed into his first book, *The Innocents Abroad*. Capitalizing on such experiences, and with a gift for humor, Clemens launched a career as a lecturer before the publication of his first books. He spent time in Washington, D.C., as a senator's clerk and briefly owned a share in a newspaper in Buffalo, New York. The volume ends with his marriage to Olivia Langdon in 1870 and their decision to relocate to her hometown of Elmira, New York, after the birth of their first child in 1871. Two additional volumes await the reader whose taste for detailed recounting of Samuel Clemens's literary practice has been whetted by this one.

Long Road to Harpers Ferry: The Rise of the First American Left, by Mark A. Lause. People's History Series. London: Pluto Press, 2018; distributed by University of Chicago Press. vi, 266 pp. Notes, index. \$99 hardcover, \$26 paperback.

Reviewer John R. Kaufman-McKivigan is Mary O'Brien Gibson Professor of History at IUPUI. He is editor or coeditor of several works by and about Frederick Douglass and is the author of *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (2008) and *War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (1984).

Historian Mark A. Lause seems engaged in a multivolume master project to document the history of antebellum and Civil War-era American radical movements. In recent years, he has authored volumes on the