In her preface to *Literary Cincinnati*, Dale Patrick Brown describes the book as an account of Cincinnati's impressive but often neglected literary history. The slim volume comprises short, loosely chronologically arranged chapters on authors from Fanny Trollope through Robert Frost, as well as a few focused on the city's literary clubs. Most of the authors selected possess considerable national fame (Charles Dickens, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sinclair Lewis et al.) as well as a connection with Cincinnati—in some instances a fairly brief one—that has been overlooked. Typical chapters constitute a biography interwoven with analysis of how the author's writing and reputation involved or invoked the city, its people, and its institutions.

Brown's journalism background is evident in a lively style attentive to the telling anecdote and the specifics of the writer's Cincinnati connections, often including surviving streets, buildings, and monuments. The book is based on her interviews, as well as research in local archives, and the footnotes and bibliography provide a guide for further research. Though not a scholarly volume in making an argument about literary culture and its development, her volume's coverage of 150 years of writing succeeds in raising popular awareness of such lesser-known but intriguing literary figures as Fannie Hurst, the popular magazine writer and “sob sister” novelist of the 1920s, who set some of her stories amid “the sauerkraut eaters of Cincinnati” (p.115), a milieu that seems also to have encouraged Hurst's remarkable social activism. With similar sensitivity, Brown presents the ways in which literary and personal experiences in the city shaped the careers and writing of more familiar authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe or, later in the century, Lafcadio Hearn. As Brown observes, Hearn's willingness to drink cattle blood in Cincinnati for a story—stemming from his desire to immerse himself in the lives of his subjects—anticipates his more celebrated assimilation into Japanese culture in the 1890s.

Many authors in Brown's survey achieved fame in their own day (Alice and Phoebe Cary, Thomas Buchanan Read, Helen Steiner Rice, even William McGuffey) but are not read now, and extracts of their poetry or writing might have given a better sense of what endeared them to their publics. The structure and space limitations of the book also forced Brown to sideline certain aspects of literary history. Emerson, for example, emerges in the context of the city's Literary Club—a group that survives today—while
Cincinnati’s branch of the transcendentalists goes nearly unremarked. James Hall, the most popular short-story writer of the early 1830s next to Washington Irving, appears only as a founder of the Semi-Colon Club, an early outlet for the Beechers. Hall was known for his writing on Native Americans and his advocacy of a distinctively western literature that would include the “mongrel vulgarisms” (Edward Watts, *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture*, 2002) of local or indigenous voices, as well as of radicals like William Gallagher, whose poetry advocated for Native rights, labor, and land reform. Brown herself is aware of the effects of hewing to a more genteel, national definition of literature; indeed, she introduces the chapter on Eliza Potter’s tell-all account of her life as an African American hairdresser in high society with a contemporary quarrel in Cincinnati newspapers over whether the book ought to be noticed—whether it was vulgar, or bold but unpolished (p. 95).

James Hall, in an 1830 story, envisioned an industrialized Ohio Valley of 2130 in which all the bookstores stood empty. Brown’s informative and entertaining book is a welcome catalogue of the personalities and authors who once and happily still fill them.

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**A Secret Society History of the Civil War**

_By Mark A. Lause_  

As one would expect, significant problems of evidence confront a historian of secret societies on the Masonic model. Swirls of misinformation, rumor, and myth cloud the reality of what were often rather less portentous organizations than they claimed to be. Given this problem, it is surprising how much we now know about this fascinating dimension of nineteenth-century politics. Following Michael A. Halleran’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Freemasonry in the American Civil War* (2010), Mark A. Lause’s book explores working-class organizations that sought to bring the practices of European nationalist and revolutionary movements to the United States. Unlike most previous work on secret societies, Lause pays attention not just to the pro-Southern organizations that were the focus of so much propaganda by the federal government during the Civil War, but also to African American fraternal organizations and especially to the tradition of socialist and utopian reformers and revolutionaries. He investigates the progressive and