

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 ac-

count 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

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. Pp. xiii, 209. Illustrations, notes, index. \$40.00.)

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

the reactionary strands of the secret society tradition.

A Secret Society History sheds light on eccentric and charismatic figures like George Lippard, founder of the Brotherhood of the Union, and George Washington Lafayette Bickley, founder of the Knights of the Golden Circle, but it is most interesting for what it reveals more generally about mid-nineteenth-century political culture. In this sense, the book's value comes from its ability to deepen our understanding of the transatlantic context of American politics. In a way, this book makes a natural companion to Lause's excellent study of the radical land reformers who played such a central role in the formation of the Republican Party (*Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community*, 2005). The two books together connect the sectional crisis over slavery—a story familiarly told in parochial and self-referential American terms—to the political currents of the nineteenth-century world and, in particular, to the crises generated by the emergence of industrial capitalism on the one hand and nationalism on the other. As recent work by Timothy M. Roberts and Andre M. Fleche has shown, the European Revolutions of 1848–49 did more than just inject a phalanx of European radicals into New York City; they exerted a profound influence on the development of American ideas about nationhood and revolution. Lause shows that European radicalism did not just shape the conceptual framework through which Americans participated in politics, it also shaped the means they used to achieve their ends.

On one level these organizations' secrecy was a mirage since, as Lause shows, their leaders were nothing if not expert public relations men who relied on the press's susceptibility to a story of intrigue. They knew that to make an organization secret inflated its perceived importance. But clandestine organizations offered a powerful means of bonding members in a common cause and giving them a sense of purpose and importance. Previous scholarship has explored the relationship between secret societies and masculinity, something implicit in Lause's work even if not explored in detail. These societies were also ideal vehicles for ideas about organizing the working class, capturing the state, or using violence—on the model of John Brown's raid or John Wilkes Booth's assassination, which both drew on European precedents—to achieve political ends.

It is a shame that Lause's prose will limit this book's appeal to general readers. But those who persevere will be rewarded with not only some interesting ideas about political culture in this period, but with a mine of fascinating nuggets of information, whether about the Knights of the Golden Circle's bathetic attempts to "invade" Mexico or the Belgian connection to Confederate nationalism. More substantively, readers will gain a richly layered understanding of political paths not taken, and of a fertile transatlantic political world full of people with great imagination and hope for the future.

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