

GARY SCHARNHORST ED, *Twain in His Own Time* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2010). 348 pp.

The anthology *Twain in His Own Time* is the first volume of a series called *Writers in Their Own Time* edited by the eminent scholar Joel Myerson. The series has so far anthologized the memories of the contemporaries of sixteen American authors—among them Frederick Douglass, Emily Dickinson and Abraham Lincoln. According to Myerson, the goal of the series is to foster a holistic understanding of “the lives of American writers” by “[p]roviding the best first-hand accounts—published and unpublished, adulatory and critical—written by both famous and forgotten contemporaries.”¹ Gary Scharnhorst, the editor of *Twain in His Own Time*, is a distinguished scholar of American Studies at the University of New Mexico and a leading Twain scholar, who has published four volumes about the prominent American writer. Among these publications is an authoritative collection of Twain’s interviews that was printed by the University of Alabama Press in 2006. *Twain in His Own Time* features an introduction by Gary Scharnhorst, a detailed chronology of Twain’s life and a bibliography as well as an index. The heart of the anthology is the ninety-four anecdotes that contemporaries of Twain remembered about their encounters with the American writer.

The memories span over a time of several decades and are organized chronologically. They voice the recollections of such gravitational figures of Twain’s life like his mother, his daughters, fellow pilots of the Mississippi River, his illustrators E.M. Kemble and Dan Beard, as well as politicians and coeval literary figures. The lengths of the memories range from one to six pages. For every recollection, Scharnhorst provides a short introduction, which situates the anecdote in the fitting historical moment of Twain’s life.

With the anthology *Twain in His Own Time*, Scharnhorst wants to cut through the veil of Mark Twain’s carefully constructed public persona. Like almost every successful artist, Twain was a marketing genius and meticulously controlled the materialization of his artistic self. Scharnhorst postulates that the selected ninety-four recollections of Twain’s contem-

poraries pierce through his public mask. He argues that the assembled voices of diverse contemporaries will enable readers to see Mark Twain in a new, much more sophisticated light. He states further that this collaborative biographical method will capture the complex personality of Mark Twain in a way no single biography can. The mosaic pictures that the diverse anecdotes provide expand the limited perception of any biographer. In this sense, one of the implicit goals of the anthology *Twain in His Own Time*, as well as the series *Writers in Their Own Time*, is the further development of impressionistic representations of significant American lives. This kind of kaleidoscopic arrangement enables audiences to attain at least three insights. Firstly, readers understand the growth of Twain’s public persona. Secondly, they realize the relationship between observer and observed, since the light and atmosphere change with every page. And thirdly, audiences are invited to construct their own impressions of Mark Twain from firsthand accounts. *Twain in His Own Time* as well as the larger series thus conforms to recent approaches in biography scholarship.

The anthology *Twain in His Own Time* presents a fractured, but professionally edited montage of Mark Twain’s persona. Contained in this progressive scholarship is diligent archival research, which makes rare primary sources available. Many of the sketches about Twain derive from personal notebooks, local newspaper interviews, and letters, and thus offer an original biography of Mark Twain which is not an easy task to accomplish. There are countless biographies about the American writer that focus on such diverse aspects as his family, his travels, his entrepreneurship, his bachelor years, his boyhood, his courtship and his final years. Gary Scharnhorst liberates Mark Twain from all these focal points with his anthology *Twain in His Own Time*.

Yet, Scharnhorst could have edited a much more inclusive and transnational picture of Mark Twain. Leading scholars in the field of American Studies have argued for a canonical turn.² However, Scharnhorst does not

¹ Myerson, Joel. *Writers in Their Own Time*. Web. 10.08.2015. <http://www.uiowapress.org/content/writers-their-own-time>

² Boelhower, William Q, and Alfred Hornung. *Multiculturalism and the American Self*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2000. Print. Hornung, Alfred. “The Birth of a Multicultural Nation: Horace M. Kallen’s Cultural Pluralism.” *Transatlantic Encounters: Studies in European-American Relations*. Ed. Udo

include any marginalized voices of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans or Latino/as in the anthology. It is hard to imagine that there are no responses from these groups when it comes to such a provocative figure. Despite the fact that it may be very difficult to locate these recollections, Scharnhorst could have addressed possible problems in his introductory remarks. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, another distinguished Twain scholar, convincingly called for a transnational turn in American Studies in 2004 and contextualizes Twain in the transnational setting in which he belongs by presenting international voices of fellow artists.³ As much as Mark Twain is an American icon,

he is also a transnational persona. His restlessness carried him all over Europe, as well as Australia, New Zealand, India, Mauritius, South Africa and China to name just a few of his stops.⁴ Unfortunately, Scharnhorst does not engage with transnational recollections, but largely favors American voices in the anthology. In conclusion, *Twain in His Own Time* offers a fresh picture of Mark Twain as well as an original approach to the genre of biography. However, Scharnhorst had the chance to edit an inclusive and transnational portrayal of Mark Twain, but unfortunately did not realize this potential.

Mainz

Christoph Lanzen

J. Hebel, Karl Ortseifen. Trier: WVT, 1995. 347–358. Hornung, Alfred. “Unstoppable Creolization: The Evolution of the South into a Transnational Cultural Space.” *The Global South. Special Issue of American Literature* 78.4 (2006): 859–867.

³ Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies.” *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005): 17–57. Fishkin, Shelley F. *The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Works*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2010. Print.

⁴ Please consider the informative book by Charles Neider for further information on Twain’s travels and in particular Selina Lai-Henderson’s study for Twain’s visits of China. Neider, Charles. *The Travels of Mark Twain*. New York: Square Press, 1961. Print. Lai-Henderson, Selina. *Mark Twain in China*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015. Print.