

American Vandal: Mark Twain Abroad, by Roy Morris, Jr. Cambridge, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015. 279 pp. \$27.95 US (cloth).

In 2015, Roy Morris, Jr.'s new book on offer, *American Vandal: Mark Twain Abroad*, takes readers back in time to the fascinating global travels of Mark Twain beginning in 1867 through the turn of the century. In five short and tightly knit chapters, the author tells the complex story of Twain's writing career, family life, and ascent to international acclaim within the framework of his overseas encounters.

Morris begins his book with the remark, "For a man who enjoyed being called — not without reason — *the American*, Mark Twain spent a surprising amount of time living and traveling abroad" (1). That being said, Twain was no regular traveller, Morris tells us, but an "American Vandal" — a persona that Twain adopted when he spoke of his travels to Europe and the Holy Land in *Innocents Abroad* and his lectures. A "brazen, unapologetic visitor to foreign lands," the American Vandal offered a perspective that departed from the travel writings of Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne (2). He had no shame in telling the reader "how *he* would be likely to see Europe and the East if he looked at them with his own eyes instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him" (19).

The sharp and eloquent prose that Morris uses enables him to succinctly weave in important details of how Twain's travels intertwine with his life and that of his family. A few interesting stories that Morris includes are Susan "Susy" Clemens's, (Twain's eldest daughter) emotional entanglement with her college friend, Louise Brownell, and the hurdles that Twain and Olivia Clemens went through as parents with the passing of Susy. As Morris depicts in detail, the family also faced a long time financial struggle that resulted in their decade-long residence in Europe. The second half of the book is darker in tone, which essentially mirrors Twain's increasingly jaded worldview and disillusionment with the eventual passing of all of his immediate family members, except his second youngest, Clara Clemens. Morris, however, does an excellent job in depicting Twain's dark years with light-heartedness without under-appreciating the gravity of the challenges with which Twain grappled.

The last two chapters touch on some of the most intriguing aspects of Twain's life, but they also speak to the weaker side of the book, that is Morris's reliance on primary sources while neglecting opportunities to offer analyses of the material. Toward the end of chapter four, for instance, Morris highlights a scenario that Twain wrote in *Following the Equator*, that while in Bombay Twain was "startled by the actions of the German-born manager, who unceremoniously punched a porter in the face for a minor offense" (173). The incident, as Morris notes, "took Twain back fifty years to his prewar days in Hannibal," where slavery was widely practiced and that a man "had a right to kill his slave if he wanted to" (174). Morris then almost immediately moves onto the respiratory infections that Twain contracted on the trip without pondering the significance of Twain's changing attitude toward slavery and US imperialism as a result of his international travels.

Indeed Morris's work would benefit from providing more historical context to the world events that Twain encountered at different stages of his travels. In the final chapter, in referencing Twain's passage on his support for the Spanish-American War (1898), all Morris wrote was, Twain "would soon have cause to reconsider his opinion" (210). A brief historical context of the war itself and why Twain was initially supportive of American intervention would allow readers better insights into the world in which Twain formed his judgment. A few pages later, after illustrating Twain's important words in an interview concerning his anti-imperialist position: "I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put his talons on another land," Morris once again transitions to a different topic of discussion (215).

Truth be told, Morris deserves credit for navigating the vast Twain archive and elucidating the stories and revelations of Twain's travels in an engaging manner. He instrumentally includes various often-neglected anti-imperialist essays of Twain: "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," "The

Czar's Soliloquy," "King Leopold's Soliloquy," and "The War Prayer" (216). Again, the discussion would be more enriching if Morris included a few more historical details that were conducive to these works. While Twain specialists might find few original insights in *American Vandal*, the book warrants an informative and pleasurable read for a wider audience.

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