



The Singular Mark Twain: A Biography

By Fred Kaplan

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One of our most distinguished biographers offers a bold, revisionist view of the inimitable Mark Twain.

Mark Twain invented American literature. His humor, his fearless evocation of how ordinary people live and speak, his ferocious social criticism, all make him the progenitor of a truly national literature. And his extraordinary books—including *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Gilded Age*, *Innocents Abroad*, *Life on the Mississippi*—were drawn from his extraordinary life. Based on original research, including access to previously unpublished correspondence, *The Singular Mark Twain* presents the first fully integrated portrait of this great American icon.

Few Americans, let alone American writers, lived such a large and eventful life. From his idyllic Hannibal, Missouri, childhood to his days as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi, from his wildcat-mining life in the Nevada territory to his reporting job in wide-open Barbary Coast San Francisco, Twain's early life was one of restless adventure. He traveled the world, and his dispatches to the United States made him famous, and wealthy.

With maturity and success, Twain grew tremendously as an artist and as a social critic. Fred Kaplan shows definitively that Twain's ferociously progressive ideas about race informed all his later works and absolve him from absurd charges of racism laid in recent years. Kaplan also details the darker side of Twain's story—the illnesses and death that plagued his family and darkened his vision, his almost comically terrible business sense that lost him his great fortune, and his paranoid sensitivity to slights and betrayals.

No American writer is more appealing, funnier, or more universally admired than Mark Twain. *The Singular Mark Twain* brings him to life as never before. Like the bestselling books of H.W. Brands, David McCullough, and Edmund Morris, *The Singular Mark Twain* is a masterful blend of history and biography, at once erudite, eye-opening, and highly entertaining.

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Editorial Review

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Kaplan begins his biographical assault on received wisdom about America's most famous novelist with the wordplay implicit in his title: Mark Twain was not only a singular writer (uniquely gifted and unsurpassed in his influence), but he was also a singular personality (not multiple or divided), his pen name signifying no deep psychic split of the sort critics have posited. Real contradictions do emerge in the life of a man who could, for instance, ridicule religion as foolish superstition and yet jump at the chance to publish the pope's authorized biography. But in these contradictions, Kaplan sees no more than the inconsistencies typical of a sophisticated mind, not deep fissures separating the artist Twain from the commercialist Clemens. Kaplan does limn a remarkably complex evolution in Twain's metamorphosis from a lightweight humorist with a flair for travel journalism into the probing author of a landmark novel on race relations, *Huckleberry Finn*. Yet Kaplan also highlights personal weaknesses that stubbornly resisted change: Twain's self-lacerating sense of guilt after every family tragedy; his foolish penchant for investing in unproven technologies; his vulnerability to personal and literary criticism. Never obtrusive, Kaplan's aesthetic and psychological insights inhere naturally in a lucid narrative. Like Kaplan's acclaimed biographies of Carlyle, Dickens, and James, this book will enlighten specialists and delight general readers. *Bryce Christensen*
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Review

PRAISE FOR GORE VIDAL: A BIOGRAPHY

"Kaplan must be commended....a splendid job."

--*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Intimate, rewarding....[Fred Kaplan] leads us back, with insight, to the works of this audacious American master."

--*Los Angeles Times*

"It is in Kaplan that all the pieces of the puzzle are at last assembled....It is Kaplan who lets us see the seeds and the shoots, the leaves and the flowers—and alas, the weeds."

--*The Nation*

PRAISE FOR DICKENS: A BIOGRAPHY

"Kaplan has spent ten years preparing and writing this book; his achievement is as rare, as wonderful, as the Dickens he brings to life. We are all the beneficiaries of this exceptional biography."

--*Los Angeles Times*

"Anyone who has not read a life of Dickens is going to prefer Fred Kaplan's long, solid, and illuminating biography furnished with new facts and theories, to any previous one they might encounter. The novelist who emerges from his study—dynamic, mercurial, self-deluding, with a big heart for the masses and a small one for his ego, makes fascinating reading."

--*Newsday*

PRAISE FOR THOMAS CARLYLE: A BIOGRAPHY

“Mr. Kaplan illuminates the Victorian era by bringing us into what we feel is the very presence of one of its idols.”

--*The New Yorker*

“Fred Kaplan has performed a labor of love and a commendatory service. His *Thomas Carlyle*, which draws on unpublished letters, gives us our most complete picture of Carlyle in the context of his age...An achievement of much merit and a gift to students of the word.”

--*Washington Post Book World*

From the Inside Flap

In this magisterial full-scale biography of America's greatest storyteller and satirist, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award finalist Fred Kaplan refashions our image of Mark Twain and etches a vibrant portrait of a singular personality who created some of the most memorable literary characters of our culture. He coined the phrase "the Gilded Age," spoke out vigorously against racism and imperialism, and in his multifaceted singularity as writer, businessman, polemicist, investor, inventor, and self-promoter became the most widely extolled and most dominant icon of American literature. As Kaplan writes, "There has been no one like him since."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christine Willis:

As people who live in often the modest era should be update about what going on or facts even knowledge to make them keep up with the era that is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to you is you don't know what one you should start with. This *The Singular Mark Twain: A Biography* is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and want in this era.

Bertie Lewis:

Nowadays reading books become more than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge even the information inside the book in which improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want feel happy read one together with theme for entertaining such as comic or novel. Often the *The Singular Mark Twain: A Biography* is kind of publication which is giving the reader capricious experience.

Marina Espinal:

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Ian Sharpless:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation or go to the outside with them household or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity honestly, that is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent the whole day to reading a publication. The book *The Singular Mark Twain: A Biography* it is rather good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book through your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book features high quality.

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