

Mark Twain -- In His Own Words

“There is something good and motherly about Washington, that grand old benevolent National Asylum for the helpless.”

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.”

“All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then Success is sure.”

“If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a man and a dog.”

“Upon arrival [in Heaven] . . . leave your dog outside. Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in.”

“Don’t go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first.”

“I have no color prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices. All I care to know is that a man is a human being, and that is enough for me; he can’t be any worse.”

“Grief can take care of itself, but to get the full value of a joy you must have somebody to divide it with.”

“It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either.”



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ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

PRESENTS

“MARK TWAIN: MAKING HIM FRESH AGAIN”

RON POWERS, GUEST LECTURER

PULITZER PRIZE (1973)

EMMY AWARD (1985)

AUTHOR, *MARK TWAIN: A LIFE* (2005)



FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2007

**AUERBACH AUDITORIUM OF
ST. MARY'S HALL**

8:00 P.M.

Excerpts from the biography, *Mark Twain: A Life*

(These three excerpts were chosen by Ben Click, associate professor of English at St. Mary's, an admirer of both Mark Twain and his biographer, Ron Powers.)

1. On the occasion when Mark Twain faced his public for the first time:

“That night, a new kind of personage materialized in America. . . . Mark Twain would move quickly to a national stage, and his words would yield unimaginable global fame and wealth. The nation would share his ecstasies and his heartbreaks. People would point him out on the street, his rocking, rolling gait, and women in lecture halls would whisper their dismay when his wife gave him children. The world would be there for him, but he would never quite be there for it. He began to talk, peering at the faces before him, and the enraptured audience inside Thomas Maguire’s Academy of Music, peered back at the nation’s first rock star.”

2. On the relations between Mark Twain and his brother:

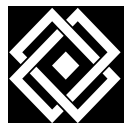
“Twain suggested that his older brother, Orion, a failure constantly seeking help from his famous younger brother, write two books, *The Autobiography of a Coward*, and *Confessions of a Life that was a Failure*. In his letter to Orion, Twain wrote: ‘. . . tell the story of an abject coward who is *unconscious* that he is a coward; & tell the story of an unsuccessful man who is blissfully unaware that he was unsuccessful & does not imagine that the reader sees he was unsuccessful. . . . Tackle one of these books, & simply tell your story to *yourself*, laying all hideous matter utterly bare, reserving nothing. . . . If the book is well done, there’s a market for it.’

Then the bland sign-off – ‘Love to Molly & all.’

Mark Twain had proposed the prototype of the 20th century’s defining cash-cow genre, the confessional memoir. He was suggesting that his brother, in the depths of his helpless abasement, abase himself a little further, for cash.”

3. On the ambiguous reactions to Twain’s speech at a dinner honoring poet John Greenleaf Whittier:

“Whatever else one might make of Mark Twain’s Whittier birthday speech, this much seems irrefutably true: he had inaugurated a venerable institution of American popular culture: the celebrity roast.”



Ron Powers

Journalist, Novelist, Biographer, Teacher, Television Critic

This coming May will see the publication of Ron Powers’ 13th book, *Last Flag Down: the Epic Journey of the Last Confederate Warship*, in collaboration with John Baldwin. The title, when viewed along with some of Powers’ other works, reveals the wide range of his interests:

- 1979 *Newscasters: The News Business as Show Business*
- 1984 *Super Tube: The Rise of Television Sports*
(winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism)
- 1986 *White Town Drowsing: Journeys to Hannibal*
- 1990 *The Beast, the Eunuch, and the Glass-Eyed Child: Television in the 80s*
- 1995 *The Cruel Radiance* (collected lectures on the craft of writing, all delivered at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference where Powers was a senior staff member, 1981-1994)
- 2000 *Flags of Our Fathers* (with James Bradley)
- 2001 *The Man Who Flew the Memphis Belle: Memoir of a WWII Bomber Pilot*
(with Robert Morgan)

Yet, over his decades-long career, Ron Powers has shown particular interest in two areas:

First, his work on Mark Twain. In 1999, Powers published *Dangerous Water: the Boy Who Became Mark Twain*, followed in 2005 by the 720-page biography that made him a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award: *Mark Twain: A Life*.

Running a close second is his work on childhood and adolescence in the United States. In 1999 he wrote and hosted a two-hour documentary on adolescent crises: “What’s Happening to Our Kids?” The year 2001 saw publication of *Tom and Huck Don’t Live Here Anymore: Searching for the Lost American Childhood*, and in March 2002 *The Atlantic Monthly* published his essay on rising teenage alienation, “The Apocalypse of Adolescence.” In 2003 he co-produced a documentary that celebrates the benefits of mentoring adolescents in the arts: “The Kids from A.R.T.”

The theme for Powers’ talk tonight is “Mark Twain: Making Him Fresh Again.” But how does one bring critical freshness to such a quintessentially American author as Mark Twain, on whom there have already been at least 40 biographies? Ben Click suggests an answer: “Ron Powers found a way to add freshness by putting Twain himself on the page and letting us see and hear him through hundreds of his letters and journals, rather than taking the usual route of theorizing about him.”

