



# Mark Twain and Male Friendship: The Twichell, Howells, and Rogers Friendships

*Peter Messent*

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Biographies of America's greatest humorist abound, but none have charted the overall influence of the key male friendships that profoundly informed his life and work. Combining biography, literary history, and gender studies, *Mark Twain and Male Friendship* presents a welcome new perspective as it examines three vastly different friendships and the stamp they left on Samuel Clemens's life.

With accessible prose informed by impressive research, the study provides an illuminating history of the friendships it explores, and the personal and cultural dynamic of the relationships. In the case of Twain and his pastor, Joseph Twichell, emphasis is put on the latter's role as mentor and spiritual advisor and on Twain's own waning sense of religious belonging. Messent then shifts gears to consider Twain's friendship with fellow author and collaborator William Dean Howells. Fascinating in its own right, this relationship also serves as a prism through which to view the literary marketplace of nineteenth-century America. A third, seemingly unlikely friendship between Twain and Standard Oil executive H.H. Rogers focuses on Twain's attitude toward business and shows how Rogers and his wife served as a surrogate family for the novelist after the death of his own wife.

As he charts these relationships, Messent uses existing work on male friendship, gender roles, and cultural change as a framework in which to situate altered conceptions of masculinity and of men's roles, not just in marriage but in the larger social networks of their time. In sum, *Mark Twain and Male Friendship* is not only a valuable new resource on the great novelist but also a lively cultural history of male friendship in nineteenth-century America.

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