



The Gilded Age (1873) (The Oxford Mark Twain)

Mark Twain

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The Gilded Age, by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, is a political *roman à clef*--a direct and caustic attack on government, politicians, and big business in Post-Civil War America. It is the book that gave an era its name. Published in 1873, the first year of the second scandal-ridden Grant administration, it is the first novel of consequence about Washington in all of American writing, as Ward Just notes in his Introduction. *The Gilded Age* "gives Washington the aspect of a clumsy frontier town of ludicrous aspirations, populated mainly by fools, racketeers, opportunists, and parvenus, most of them members of the United States Congress," Just writes. *The Gilded Age* trains its satire on corruption in politics, business and the courts; "As Twain famously said, there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress, and the great triumph of *The Gilded Age* is that we are given chapter and verse on how the thievery is done." Just notes that readers will see for themselves whether Twain and Warner's subtitle for *The Gilded Age*--"A Tale of To-Day"--is still accurate.



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