



# The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself

*P. T. Barnum*

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## **The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself** P. T. Barnum

For more than fifty years, Phineas T. Barnum embodied all that was grand and fraudulent in American mass culture. Over the course of a life that spanned the nineteenth century (1810-91), he inflicted himself upon a surprisingly willing public in a variety of guises, from newspaper editor (or libeler) to traveling showman (or charlatan) and distinguished public benefactor (or shameless hypocrite). Barnum deliberately cultivated his ambiguous public image through a lifelong advertising campaign, shrewdly exploiting the cultural and technological capabilities of the new publishing industry. While running his numerous shows and exhibitions, Barnum managed to publish newspaper articles, expose of fraud (not his own), self-help tracts, and a series of best-selling autobiographies, each promising to give 'the true history of my many adventures'. Updated editions of "The Life of P.T. Barnum" appeared regularly, allowing Barnum to keep up with demand and prune the narrative of details that might offend posterity. The present volume is the first modern edition of Barnum's original and outrageous autobiography, published in 1855 and unavailable for more than a century. Brazen, confessional, and immensely entertaining, it immortalizes the showman who hoodwinked customers into paying to hear the reminiscences of a woman presented as George Washington's 161-year-old nurse, the impresario who brought Jenny Lind to America and toured Europe with General Tom Thumb, and the grand entrepreneur of the American Museum of New York. Above all, it ensures that Barnum would be properly remembered ...exactly as he created himself.

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