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Santa Claus: A Biography

Gerry Bowler

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Santa Claus: A Biography Gerry Bowler
An entertaining, often surprising look at the life of the world's most influential fictional character.

He is the embodiment of charity and generosity, a creation of mythology, a tool of clever capitalists. The very idea of him is enduring and powerful.

Santa Claus was born in early-nineteenth-century America, but his family tree goes back seven hundred years to Saint Nicholas, patron saint of children. Intervening generations were shaggy and strange — whip-wielding menaces to naughty boys and girls. Yet as the raucous, outdoor, alcohol-fuelled holiday gave way to a more domestic, sentimental model, a new kind of gift-bringer was called for — a loveable elf, still judgmental but far less threatening.

In this engaging social and cultural history, Gerry Bowler examines the place of Santa Claus in history, literature, advertising, and art. He traces his metamorphosis from a beardless youth into a red-suited peddler. He reveals the lesser-known aspects of the gift-bringer's life — Santa's involvement with social and political causes of all stripes (he enlisted on the Union side in the American Civil War), his starring role in the movies and as adman for gun-makers and insurance companies. And he demolishes the myths surrounding Santa Claus and Coca-Cola.

Santa Claus: A Biography will stand as the classic work on the long-lived and multifarious Mr. Claus.

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