



Pudd'nhead Wilson/Those Extraordinary Twins

Mark Twain , Darryl Pinckney (Introduction)

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Written during Mark Twain's so-called pessimistic period, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a darkly comic masterpiece that exposes the wounds of racism in America & the absurdity of judging character based upon class or skin color. Set in a small Mississippi River town in the state of Missouri before the Civil War, the novel begins when Roxana, a beautiful slave who can pass for white, switches the child of her master with her own infant son, now called Tom, who grows into a cruel and cowardly man. When Tom's uncle, Judge Driscoll, is found murdered after a botched robbery attempt, suspicion is cast upon two former sideshow performers, Luigi & Angelo Capello, a pair of good-looking & charming identical twins from Italy. Meanwhile, David Pudd'nhead Wilson is a wise but unorthodox lawyer who collects fingerprints as a hobby. Shunned as an eccentric, he ultimately wins the respect of the townspeople when he solves the murder mystery & reveals the true identity of the killer. Often hilarious, sometimes appalling, always fast-paced, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is ultimately a fierce condemnation of a racially prejudiced society that was predicated upon the institution of slavery. This edition also includes Twain's related short story, *Those Extraordinary Twins*.

Pudd'nhead Wilson/Those Extraordinary Twins Details

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Author : Mark Twain , Darryl Pinckney (Introduction)

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From Reader Review Pudd'nhead Wilson/Those Extraordinary Twins for online ebook

Walter Schretz says

Some really fine parts,,some real insight and acerbic humor.
The whole is not equal to the parts. Nevertheless worth reading
or rereading-it's quite short.

Paul Preston says

Prince and the Pauper with a Southern America spin. Good historical story with some decent character development.

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Spoilers

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Maybe you shouldn't hand out your fingerprints to just anyone that asks.

R.K. Cowles says

3 3/4 stars

Shannon says

Though I love Huck and Jim, Roxana of Twain's "Puddn'head Wilson" is far more complexly rendered. It is through her that Twain's most explicit indictment of slavery is made. Her choice to allow her wretch of a son to sell her down the river and deeper into slavery after she has spent the last twenty years as a free woman touches the very corners of human sympathy. My only complaint is that I wanted to see more of her. She sweeps into the narrative briefly and then disappears for twenty pages at a time. For me, Twain's preoccupations with twins, dueling, and the then nascent science of fingerprinting muddle the text and detract from the force of his most compelling character.

In the humorous short story "Those Extraordinary Twins," Twain takes a closer look at the relationship between twins and ultimately, the internal conflict of a divided self. The story works better from a narrative

perspective than “Pudd’nhead Wilson.” Yet, together these pieces give a fascinating look at the writing process of one of our best loved authors, as he directly comments on the revision and separation of the novella that became “Pudd’nhead Wilson” and the short story now known as “Those Extraordinary Twins.”

I give it four stars because it’s funny and moving as only Twain can be.

Barnaby Hazen says

Terrific classic. Genesis of CSI, if you think about it--early courtroom drama. I'd really be interested to know when the concept of the fingerprint being used as evidence came about, because Twain did a great job presenting it as if for the first time in this little historical town.

So there's this other item of personal note, meant especially for authors currently alive and writing. Twain's use of colloquial, phonetic language on behalf of African American slaves is beyond reproach given what he did to call attention to unfair treatment of people of color. He was arguably one of the first civil rights activists, if authorship can itself be considered activism, which I strongly believe.

In this book, the fact that I find phonetic use of colloquial speech distracting as a reader did not bother me other than early on, while I was adjusting; all the while I was certain that it would be well worth the patience in adjusting to the phonetic representations, and indeed I was far from disappointed.

So I take this review as an opportunity to make a side-note to other authors--I beg you, please don't spell colloquial speech patterns out painstakingly, and just as they sound as a habit throughout your manuscripts or publications. Split the difference somehow--maybe give us a taste and make references to it with a word or two as you go, if you're afraid we'll forget there's an accent in place. It's just distracting. Twain was entitled to this, you are not; get over it and write in the language you have chosen, leading us with the colloquial in the least distracting way that you can and still keep it represented, or I's gwine tuh give ya a whuping!

P.S. Winn says

Mark Twain is amazing and anything by this author is a great read grand adventure, humor and extraordinary writing make this and all the author's books great for readers of all ages,

Lainie says

A book group selection, otherwise I can't imagine I would have chosen to read this. But I'm so glad I did. It was fun! Mark Twain's writing is famous for many reasons, but in this book I especially noticed how timeless his humor is. He conveys the irony of human foibles like no one else.

In this edition, you get Pudd'nhead Wilson in the first half of the book, and it's great. Then, the second half

reproduces *Those Extraordinary Twins*, which he starts off by telling you that it's an earlier idea that morphed into *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and how. He delivers sections of his original novel, pointing out where he kept or diverted to tell the PW story. It's quite interesting and even delivers more laughs. Like outtakes at the end of a film.

Fun score: 8 out of 10

Recommended!

Zach says

Pudd'nhead Wilson is an extraordinary novel wherein Mark Twain explores the human condition through the lenses of humor, suffering, irony, and race, et al. Twain's dexterous use of these lenses allows the reader a waterfall of new insights into what it means to be alive.

Twain's exploration of how race affects what it means to be alive is stunning & edifying on every plane of understanding & existence I am capable of experiencing -- it may even be stronger than *Huckleberry Finn* in this aspect, which is incredible in its own regard.

Throughout *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain's beautifully layered levels of irony help the reader shift through multiple perspectives with an array of emotions & empathies. These beautifully layered levels of irony allow the novel to touch upon the sublime, for my part.

Ah, and the humor: I smiled and laughed so many times while reading this novel it felt like I was enjoying time with a best friend.

Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar begins each chapter with a usually pithy & an always insightful quote -- they include some of Twain's finest. Here's a current favorite.

"April 1. This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty-four."

Sarah says

4 stars for *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, 2 stars for *Those Extraordinary Twins*.

Jose says

Is this book "ultimately a fierce condemnation of a racially prejudiced society that was predicated upon the institution of slavery?" Not necessarily. it was a fun story, though.

I really enjoyed the courtroom drama, an obvious precursor to the infamous *To Kill a Mockingbird* as well as *Inherit the Wind*. The characterization and dramatic irony keep the story going.

I'm glad Twain let go of the conjoined twins idea. Although a good basis for Pudd'nhead Wilson, refocusing the story made this short novel bearable.

N A says

You can tell that this was written at the end of his career. It's like he's so exhausted with life and humanity that he doesn't bother with fully developing any characters or themes, and so it's one long meandering story with occasional moments of brilliance. At times it feels like reading a stream of consciousness. I wish he had happened on this concept at an earlier point in his life when he had more energy and perhaps wasn't quite so jaded.

Sam, I know you needed the money, but I think you would have been better served by spending your time elsewhere.

Avery says

I never realized how awesome a writer Twain was until I finished this novel.

Elizabeth says

This is definitely a well-kept secret. There are a lot of unknown Twain novels that are quite good, but this is sometimes referred to by critics as the third of his truly American novels. I like this book, and considering I had to write a whole research paper on it that's saying something. As a story it's good, with a murder mystery, daggers, children switched at birth, etc... But on a deeper level it deals with slavery and miscegenation, humanity and the nature v. nurture concept. Very interesting. There is also a lot of humor, particularly if you have a cynical and sarcastic side. The aphorisms at the beginning of every chapter from Wilson's Almanac are priceless.

Nathan Jerpe says

I went for the Oxford Mark Twain edition. Highly recommended. If you're going to spend time with the master, do it right. The edition is in hardback and it's a facsimile of the original 1893 printing, so you get all the illustrations and orthographic oddities.

This is my second OMT out of twenty-nine total. I've been thinking it'd be a nice life project to sit down and read them all.

Karen says

The first story, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, is quite good, if rather dated in ideals and speech. The second story, *Those Extraordinary Twins*, was written with the throwaway bits from the first story, and it feels like it. My recommendation: Stop after the first story. The second story does tackle the nature/nurture debate, but so do many other books that are worth reading.

Garren says

Mark Twain: great writer, terrible novelist.

When I say someone is great at *writing*, I mean the business of picking words, laying sentences together, and turning out perfect paragraphs. If I accuse someone of being a great storyteller, well that's a different skill. Storytelling is about creating satisfying plot or characters either along the way or from an appraising distance after the whole thing is over.

Pudd'nhead Wilson kicks off with absolute top shelf writing. I gave it five preemptive stars and a note about not imagining a world where I would end up giving it a lower rating. Well, here I am in an unimagined world.

I would have said that Twain created some interesting characters in a pickle of a situation, then ran dry on ideas. Nope! Twain explains in a note that everything I liked came out of a late decision to rewrite the first two-thirds to focus on characters that started out as incidental folks in another story (and the other story is awful). I half think he's lying and made up the story of the rewrite to conceal his intentions for the twins as they appear in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. To avoid spoiling what I mean, I'll just say that racism wasn't the only prejudice Twain seems to have been addressing in *Pudd'nhead*; perhaps he realized it was too soon to start on that conversation.

Anyway, file this one next to *The Man Who Was Thursday* as the literary equivalents of drag racers going over a cliff. Pity.

Ryan says

This book falls into the "small town on the Mississippi" category of Twain's novels. The story seems a little scattered and has some characters and scenes that don't really serve any purpose. There are a few great characters - Roxana and Pudd'nhead - and the best bits of the novel are of course the entries from Pudd'nhead's calendar at the beginning of every chapter. I actually enjoyed the farce (*Those Extraordinary Twins*) better than the tragedy it turned into (*Pudd'nhead Wilson*).

Steven says

This is a great edition of the two stories if you want to learn more about them. As for the stories themselves...they are flawed but a fun read. If you like Mark Twain, you will like these stories, if you don't, then you can probably skip them.

Jason Prodoehl says

This is an engaging story. It took a lot for me to keep going through it though. It seems to be darker than I thought it would be. Still there is plenty of wit and interest to hold your attention and feed your curiosity. It is fascinating to read about life in the 1890s.

Susan Marcus says

I've read almost every novel Sam Clemens wrote, but saved this one for its timeliness. Why timely? Mark Twain's biting insights into the frailties and hypocrisy of American common culture pertain to current U.S. cultural and political phenomena. Endemic racism, demagoguery and the embrace of gossip and misinformation supporting unshakeable core values are a few American characteristics he satirizes. I cringed as I read it but couldn't resist nodding, yes, Mark Twain, you are a creature of your time, but you know and expose so many of our idiocies that have persisted from your days into our own.
