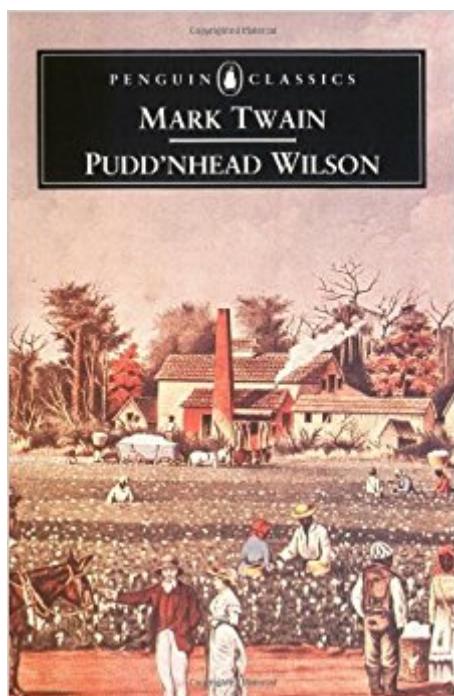


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Puddnhead Wilson : And, Those Extraordinary Twins (The Penguin English Library)



Synopsis

At the beginning of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* a young slave woman, fearing for her infant's son's life, exchanges her light-skinned child with her master's. From this rather simple premise Mark Twain fashioned one of his most entertaining, funny, yet biting novels. On its surface, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* possesses all the elements of an engrossing nineteenth-century mystery: reversed identities, a horrible crime, an eccentric detective, a suspenseful courtroom drama, and a surprising, unusual solution. Yet it is not a mystery novel. Seething with the undercurrents of antebellum southern culture, the book is a savage indictment in which the real criminal is society, and racial prejudice and slavery are the crimes. Written in 1894, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* glistens with characteristic Twain humor, with suspense, and with pointed irony: a gem among the author's later works.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Mark Twain, in his presentation of Negroes as human beings, stands head and shoulders above the other Southern writers of his times.” •Langston Hughes --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Featuring the brilliantly drawn Roxanna, a mulatto slave who suffers dire consequences after switching her infant son with her master's baby, and the clever Pudd'nhead Wilson, an ostracized small-town lawyer, Twain's darkly comic masterpiece is a provocative exploration of slavery and

miscegenation. Leslie A. Fiedler described the novel as "half melodramatic detective story, half bleak tragedy," noting that "morally, it is one of the most honest books in our literature." "Those Extraordinary Twins, the slapstick story that evolved into *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, provides a fascinating view of the author's process. The text for this Modern Library Paperback Classic was set from the 1894 first American edition. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I have mixed feelings about this novel. While it deals frankly with the harsh and irrational racist views of the period, and is also a sharp satire of the provincialism and prejudice of small town society, the tone is rather like a Victorian farce with characters that are mostly broad caricatures. As Twain self-deprecatingly notes in the afterword, this book was created from a collection of disparate ideas that don't completely gel (and are revisited in *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Prince and the Pauper*). Still, it's a good story that culminates in a courtroom drama that must have been quite ahead of its time. Certainly worth reading for those interested in American Literature or cultural history, but not one of my favorites. Of course, for those not familiar with Twain, be warned that much of the dialogue is in the patois of 19th century American slaves making it sometimes difficult to understand and possibly offensive to some.

Currently writing a research paper on this book. Very convenient to have it on the Kindle to highlight in different colors and go portability. A lesser known story by Mark Twain, a companion to "Those Extraordinary Twins." Very interesting to research to intended message behind the book, how Twain failed in delivering it and why.

this has been on my Kindle for years and I finally got around to reading it. I was surprised at how much I liked it. It was easy to follow and the story line was interesting to me. Sometimes, I couldn't quite understand the dialect, but managed to get thru it. I

Mark Twain is an extraordinarily funny writer. His observations of the ridiculous in human nature are never better than in this book, about the switching of eight month old babies, one a privileged heir, the other a slave, and how this eventually comes to light. Twain titles the book a tragedy, true enough when one considers that it involves a murder that is solved, very dramatically, in the courtroom by use of fingerprints. But his portraits of the various characters are priceless, He pokes at the worst trait of each character, using biting satire to make their foibles clear. And nobody escapes his sharp pen. My only negative is his constant use of slave dialect, which was wearying.

By far the best part of the book is at the very end, in a postscript called "Author's Note to 'Those Extraordinary Twins'". In it, Twain describes the difficulty of having a tale start one way and end another, and I laughed out loud over and over as I read it. If you read the book, be sure to read the postscript!

I'm not a Twain aficionado, but in the interest of better knowing my Southern literary 'roots', I've been trying to read some of his less popular works. *The Mysterious Stranger* was better, in my opinion. However, this was quite the interesting look into the lives of small town residents, slaves and slave owners, with the intrigue of a murder mystery. There was some humor. Mostly it was the drama of their lives, the suspense of a good whodunnit, and the tragic end of...well, I'll leave you to find that out. Twain built the intensity of the narrative well and I found myself reading faster and faster the closer I got to the end. Recommended.

Twain has a way to bring fictitious characters to life. Too many authors have 'variations on a few personalities.' Twain gives each one a distinct personality, a way of speaking, and a series of consistent behaviours. Each character is known and either liked or disliked. He tells a tale in a way I find fascinating and enjoyable. His style initially seems to be simple but it is clever, witty and entertaining. When I need a break from intense dramas, thrillers, and suspense offerings, I know I can find a rewarding experience from Mark Twain.

Mark Twain presents a consistent outlook on his fellow man; that we are mostly foolish and feeble-minded. Who am I to say he is wrong! In *Puddn'head Wilson* he delivers this again by means of a startling twist. Two infants are switched by a slave mother who replaces her master's baby with her own mostly white child, and vice versa. This crime is eventually uncovered by means of the latest in 19th century crime fighting science. I love Mark Twain, but this book could have been much better. By Twain's own admission it started as another story entirely, but morphed into the one I just described. He says he tore out much of the old story "root and branch". However there remains some aspects of the original story which are inconsistent and awkward in the published "Puddn'head Wilson". Just a bit more re-writing and this may have been a masterpiece. Nevertheless, this being one of his last books, and published late in his life, I will give him a break. I enjoyed it as is.

We had to read for Lit II. I actually loved the story. It really makes us think about the importance we

place on social status and race, and what really molds who a person is. Would definitely recommend this book.

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