



Great Short Works

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Selected works of humour and criticism by a revered American master.

Beloved by millions, Mark Twain is the quintessential American writer. More than anyone else, his blend of scepticism, caustic wit and sharp prose defines a certain American mythos. While his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is still taught to anyone who attends school and is considered by many to be the Great American Novel, Twain's shorter stories and criticisms have unequalled style and bite.

In a review that's less than kind to the writing of James Fenimore Cooper, Twain writes: "Every time a Cooper person is in peril, and absolute silence is worth four dollars a minute, he is sure to step on a dry twig. There may be a hundred handier things to step on, but that wouldn't satisfy Cooper. Cooper requires him to turn out and find a dry twig; and if he can't do it, go and borrow one." It's difficult to imagine anyone else writing in quite this style, which is why Twain's legacy only continues to grow.

Great Short Works Details

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Alison says

A lot of great stuff here; I especially loved "Old Times on the Mississippi," which shored up my recent ambition to become a riverboat pilot (first inspired by John McPhee's riverboating piece in *The New Yorker*). "The Jumping Frog" was a lot funnier than I remembered, once I got to the stuff about the dog and "Flies, Dan'l, flies!"--and was capped by the French translation and Twain's indignant French-to-English retranslation--absolutely French As She Is Spoke. Then on the subway I discovered that I'm a laugh-out-loud sucker for a glass eye joke. (OK, not funny! But there I am.) And there are all the funny layers of "The Story of a Speech," though I think he got me with the first Longfellow joke. But then...mature Twain got a-pondering about truth, and hypocrisy, and violence, and the cruel selfish pettiness of humans. I'm all for pondering that kind of stuff, and I admire his sternness with regard to human frailty, but it was a shame that in his morality stories he often suppressed his humor and style in favor of a prosy, even grossly sentimental mode. He could not always work up to his own standards, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" notwithstanding. And sometimes he failed even his own moral imperatives: sometimes he didn't think as hard as a writer as uncompromising, intelligent, and scrupulous as he was should have done. "The United States of Lyncherdom," his anti-lynching polemic, is almost unbearably flawed. Reason #1 why lynching is wrong? The notoriety attached to lynchings will encourage addled, attention-starved black men to go around raping and murdering more white women. Cringe cringe cringe, even while Twain goes on to uphold the rule of law, mourn for the families of lynched men, and decry the cowardice, ignorance, and urges toward conformity that turn white men into lynch mobs. And cringe cringe cringe all through his anti-war, anti-imperialist, and anti-missionary polemics--all, ultimately, leaning more toward the side of the angels, but, my God, if they don't all show their own traces of corn-pone opining! I suppose, though, that these contradictions in his writing and thought, the same kind as those that appear in *Huck Finn*, not only are inextricably tied up with, but also underscore the importance of what Twain achieved at his very best.

Gregorio says

His nonfiction may drag a little, but his wit and humor is unmatched. He has philosophies that are still very relevant today, and in this edition there is the best story about Satan I have ever read. If this rating was just on that story, it would be 6 stars out of five, as it is the best novella I have ever read. Highly recommended.

CLAW says

Pudd'n Head Wilson- MY FAVOURITE SHORT STORY next to Vonneguts' sci-fi short story about the woman with a gorgeous body and fountain youth yet all of her organs rested in the basement. I can't remember the title, but this I carried around with me all of 1999.

Linda Hudson says

Overall, I liked it. Some stories more than others. Mark Twain's critique of Cooper always amuses me!

Pascale says

I had never read Mark Twain until I finally pulled this old yard sale paperback down from my bookshelves. What a discovery! Many stories, some of them true, most of them fabricated, but all infused with humor. I loved reading "The Mysterious Stranger," a dark tale of mankind's foibles.

Galo Noboa says

It was hard for me reading these stories, since English is not my first language, and the language used is basically Old English, but I have to admit that I loved these stories, "the man who corrupted Hydeburghs" a true story "and of course "The war prayer"

Cathy says

Waiting in the stacks, I've checked out a few shorts, good

ClayOla says

Thoughts on all kinds of things by Twain, who is like nobody else. Great if you need a laugh.

Sherry says

Excellent! I love Mark Twain! Not every story will be forever remembered, but even the shorts I was less fond of where so well written I enjoyed the word play. I often love the language use in stories more than the plot. And of course Twain has a great sense of humor.

Metzer52 says

Most of the stuff is not very good or interesting at all, I guess that there were not that many short works to make a decent compilation. "The mysterious stranger" is worth reading if you can find it separate (4 stars), and "The man who corrupted Hadleyburg" is OK (3 stars)

Chose Bine says

Les deux meilleurs récits du recueil sont sans contredit «Old Times on the Mississippi» et «The Mysterious Stranger». Dans cette dernière nouvelle, écrite à la fin de sa vie, Mark Twain fait ressortir avec sarcasme tout le ridicule de ce pitoyable animal qu'est l'être humain.

Michelle Johnson says

Read for "Satire: Johnathan Swift to Jon Stewart," FA09, John Sitter.

Read: "The Man who Corrupted Hadleyburg," "The United States of Lyncherdom," "To The Person Sitting in Darkness," and several other pieces.

Steve says

Twenty short stories including: Old Times on the Mississippi; The Jumping Frog; The Great Landslide Case; Jim Blaine and his Grandfather's Ram; A True Story; Accident insurance -- Etc.; The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut; The Story of a Speech; Jim Baker's Bluejay; The Private History of a Campaign that Failed; A Letter to the Earth; Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses; How to Tell a Story; Corn-Pone Opinions; The United States of Lyncherdom; To the Person Sitting in Darkness; the War Prayer; The Turning Point of My Life; The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg; and The Mysterious Stranger. Some of Twain's razor sharp observations of the human condition could have been written today, and some of the stories gave me a unique perspective of life in the United States during the civil war years that I hadn't thought about. While his ending to the Mysterious Stranger was a depressing way to end this collection it made sense to end with one of his last stories and I really enjoyed this book overall.

Mgipple says

I couldn't get through it. This collection includes Life on the Mississippi, the frog story, and some other works by Twain like a book review and a speech on writing/delivery. Life on the Mississippi is excellent. Apparently this is classic Twain, I wouldn't know because I haven't read much, but his writing really makes you feel like what he's telling you is fact, not fiction. Some of the claims he makes in the story are obviously false, but going along in the book you don't notice them as untrue or ridiculous until you step back from the story. Two other positives from the story, it's funny, and it's written so that the reader feels smart - you can kind of predict where the story is going and it's pleasing when you predict correctly. The problem with this book is the rest of it. I didn't find the other works all that impressive and lost interest. I was looking to read short stories by Twain, and the other items in this book were not that. Others might like the book reviews and other stuff, it just wasn't what I wanted.
