"Clo'es could do de like o' dat": Race, Place, and Power in Mark Twain's *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*

by Garrett Nichols

Michel Foucault teaches us in *The Order of Things* (1966) that the principle of resemblance guided premodern systems of knowledge and organization. He writes:

> Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. . . . And representation—whether in the service of pleasure or of knowledge—was posited as a form of repetition: the theatre of life or the mirror of nature, that was the claim made by all language, its manner of declaring its existence and of formulating its right of speech. (17)

Premodern western society relied on resemblance to structure and create discourses of knowledge and truth, providing order to the vast realm of what was "known" to be true. This old order, according to Foucault, started to break down when knowledge took up "residence in a new space" in which identity was no longer based on visibility and similitude but on "the relation between elements (a relation in which visibility no longer plays a role) and of the functions they perform"

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(218). Modern identity and social ordering began to depend on the functions and internal structures of individuals rather than mere similarities between them.

Mark Twain's *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) maps a similar transition from an old order of similitude and appearance based on genealogy to one of internal function based on biology. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain's characters must move beyond the visible surface in a power structure based on fluid notions of appearance and behavior to resituate power within individual biological difference. Dawson's Landing, the antebellum Missouri town in which the novel takes place, operates under an older power regime that becomes disrupted when miscegenation threatens to undermine social order and appearance and behavior are no longer sufficient designating race because the system is now openly about biology and the body. Thus, either the social order must change, or new strategies must arise to maintain the old one.

The strategic maneuvering by which these changes take place relies on a specific understanding of the social relationship between racism and geography. The novel's thematic tension surrounding the blurring of racial divisions mirrors a similar anxiety about the blurring of social and cultural boundaries separating Dawson's Landing from the outside. Twain positions Dawson's Landing as an antiquated river town populated by residents who quickly dismiss more cosmopolitan outsiders. By the end of the novel, these two parallel tensions—between racial purity and miscegenation *and* between insider traditions and outsider influences—intersect as a cosmopolitan outsider "solves" the racial confusion resulting from miscegenation.

Pudd'nhead Wilson has two central conflicts. The first conflict lies largely at the level of plot and informs the second. The novel's main plot involves Tom Driscoll, born a slave named Valet de Chambers to his mother, Roxy, who switches him at birth with her master's son. Roxy's ruse succeeds because, due to a long history of miscegenation, she and Tom look white. Tom grows up believing he is a white aristocrat, mistreats his slaves, and pays off gambling debts by disguising himself in drag to rob homes. When Judge Driscoll, his guardian, catches him trying to steal money, Tom stabs him with a knife he has stolen from Luigi and Angelo Capello, two Italian twins with aristocratic ties who recently moved to Dawson's Landing. This plot conflict lies in whether or not David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, an East Coast-educated lawyer from New York, will discover the real murderer and reveal the switching of the babies.

Thematically, the novel's conflict lies less with Tom than it does with the manipulations and machinations of power strategies by Roxy and Wilson. Both are keen observers of human nature, and both understand how power works in

Dawson's Landing. Roxy resists this power by appropriating and subverting its strategies. Wilson, on the other hand, ends up introducing new strategies in order to more firmly cement the structure that already exists. Between these two characters, a thematic conflict between power and resistance plays out, culminating in a dénouement at the seat of rural power: the city courthouse.

The original social order derives from the code of the First Families of Virginia (F.F.V.). The F.F.V. code helps to bridge an old aristocratic code common to early eighteenth-century society and a new modernist system based on individual difference and the questioning of accepted identities. The power brokers in Dawson's Landing are those who trace their lineage back to Virginia's old guard: Judge Driscoll; the lawyer Pembroke Howard; the judge's brother, Percy Northumberland Driscoll; and Colonel Essex, among others, are the F.F.V.s of "formidable caliber" who run the town because of their lineal ties to East Coast aristocracy (4–5). Their lineage necessarily holds them to a higher code of conduct than other citizens, but their adherence to these expectations helps them maintain their place at the top of the social pantheon. Pembroke Howard, for example,

> was another old Virginia grandee with proved descent from the First Families. He was a fine, brave, majestic creature, a gentleman according to the nicest requirements of the Virginia rule, a devoted Presbyterian, an authority on the "code," and a man always courteously ready to stand up before you in the field if any act or word of his had seemed doubtful or suspicious to you, and explain it with any weapon you might prefer, from brad-awls to artillery. (5)

Pembroke knows his social status derives from his heritage, but he cannot rely solely on genealogical ties to hold his position. In order to maintain his hold on social power, he forces his appearance and behavior into alignment with his ancestors' code. Howard's physical and behavioral devotion to the F.F.V. codes hints at the difficulties a town such as Dawson's Landing would have with the introduction of people and ideas foreign to the founding concepts of the F.F.V. It also indicates a paradoxical closing of the borders for Dawson's Landing: though the town proudly traces its cultural and legal precedents to Virginian settlers in Missouri, new settler influences are distrusted and discouraged.

Although this system succeeds for decades, growth, youth, and new racial anxieties begin to undermine it. Twain's description of Dawson's Landing alludes to the quiet change coming to the town: "Dawson's Landing was a slave-holding town, with a rich slave-worked grain and pork country back of it. The town was sleepy, and comfortable, and contented. It was fifty years old, and was growing

slowly—very slowly, in fact, but still it was growing" (4). This slow growth quietly threatens Dawson's Landing's sleepy, comfortable contentment but goes unnoticed because of its citizens' adherence to the visible appearance dictated by the F.F.V. code. Though the code explicitly concerns the descendants of the Virginia families, it does so by setting itself up as a standard for what non-F.F.V. citizens are not. Yet appearance and behavior can no longer suitably maintain these distinctions. As the biology that underlies the genealogical basis for power quietly makes itself too prominent to ignore, characters begin to take advantage of this slippage.

Roxy, the "one-sixteenth" black slave of Judge Driscoll, embodies this confusion. When David Wilson looks out his window to observe a loud conversation on the street, he expects to see two black slaves. While both are slaves, only one, Jasper, is black: "From Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, *but she was not*. Only one-sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show" (9, emphasis added). The phrase "but she was not" reveals a subtle but important distinction between the biological characteristics thought to undergird racial difference and the discourses of appearance meant to reveal them. Twain's narrator does not consider Roxy to be black, but nor does he deny that she acts and speaks according to stereotypes of black identity. He writes:

> She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in the cheeks, her face was full of character and expression, her eyes were brown and liquid, and she had a heavy suit of fine soft hair which was also brown, but the fact was not apparent because her head was bound about with a checkered handkerchief and the hair was concealed beneath it. (9)

Twain's troubling description of Roxy implies that her "majestic form and stature" are uncharacteristic of black women, but nevertheless, the key to understanding Dawson's Landing's power structure lies in this passage. Despite all of her attributes matching white standards of beauty, Roxy is identified as both black and slave because of a simple handkerchief, what Linda Morris calls "one of the most powerful and persistent of racial markers" (39). Slavery's visible uniform effectively negates Roxy's "majestic form and stately grace."

Other characters also confuse these increasingly antiquated yet still potent power strategies. In an episode that highlights the intertwined discourses of race and geography, the town's subjects punish Tom Driscoll for assuming the urban mannerisms of the East Coast. When Tom returns from Yale, his new "eastern

polish" aggravates the town's sense of decorum: "He brought home with him a suit of clothes of such exquisite style and cut and fashion—eastern fashion, city fashion—that it filled everybody with anguish and was regarded as a peculiarly wanton affront" (26). The town responds by dressing up a slave in similar clothes to mock Tom's sense of style. With this act, the town indicates that it considers Tom's sartorial affront on par with a slave who refuses to respect the recognized social order, enforced largely through the belief that appearance accurately reflects social bearing. It further reveals an anxiety in Dawson's Landing about the ease with which supposedly stable social structures might be subverted. White supremacy and geography combine in this moment to assert a social hierarchy that determines specific delineations of race, class, and gender. A subtle, yet powerful, discourse of normativity pervades Dawson's Landing, and the introduction of deviant discourses, whether raced, classed, or gendered (Tom's tailoring and the town's "anguish" hint at unappreciated dandyism), has a polarizing effect that jars this delicate balance. Twain writes that Tom "surrendered" to the town's wishes but afterwards found the town increasingly dull. His experiences outside the power structures of Dawson's Landing leave him incapable of reintegrating into life there, and he begins to spend more of his time in metropolitan St. Louis (26).

In one of Roxy's first scenes, Twain establishes the power structure in which African Americans find themselves dominated by distinctions of race, class, and religion. After Percy Driscoll's accuses his slaves of theft and threatens to sell them "down the river" should no one confess, Twain reveals the situation as one of warfare, not simple domination. Roxy is innocent of this specific theft, but she has stolen before and will again. Twain writes:

> Was she bad? Was she worse than the general run of her race? No. They had an unfair show in the battle of life, and they held it no sin to take military advantage of the enemy—in a small way; in a small way, but not a large one. . . . On frosty nights the humane negro prowler would warm the end of the plank and put it up under the cold claws of chickens roosting in a tree; . . . and the prowler would dump her into his bag, and later into his stomach, perfectly sure that in taking this trifle from the man who daily robbed him of an inestimable treasure—his liberty—he was not committing any sin that God would remember against him in the Last Great Day. (12)

Under this paradigm, slaves find openings for acts of rebellion, but these acts are by no means sufficient to challenge existing power structures. The creation of "docile bodies" reinforces the structure of power in which slaves find themselves (*Discipline* 136). Though acts of subversion and outward rebellion refuse

the indoctrination of docility required by the social structure, they do not change the social and economic framework of slavery. In fact, such challenges to the system are deliberately hidden. These actions are more a matter of personal survival than of conscious rebellion, although Twain's evocation of military tactics suggests the possibility of a more direct form of resistance. They are insufficient precisely because they do not usurp but work around power's limits. Within the logic of both Twain's novel and Foucault's theoretical framework, transgression relies on power's existing tactics. In order to transgress the situated powers of oppression, the dominated must recognize and appropriate the strategies of domination.

As Lois McNay points out, Foucault's theories have been criticized for portraying power as uni-directional from the top down with no room for individual resistance. McNay argues that in Foucault's later works, especially *The Care of the Self* and *The Use of Pleasure*, he makes accommodations for resistance but that resistance must work within the discourse mandated by the dominant structure. Working effectively outside of this structure, she argues, is both impossible and inefficient. In fact, Foucault makes individual resistance a possibility much earlier than these last two books. In *Discipline and Punish*, he writes:

> power . . . is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation," but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. (26)

Conceiving of power as a strategy allows for the reappropriation of these strategies by subjects such as Roxy. When strategies become too diffuse, as they have in Dawson's Landing, subjects may more easily adopt them to their own subversive purposes.

Roxy soon realizes that the fluidity of appearance allows her to undermine the principle of resemblance in Dawson's Landing while still appearing submissive, opening up a portal through which other characters may confront their own predetermined subjectivities. Roxy's desires to kill herself and her son, Valet de Chambers, to prevent them from being sold down the river, an impulse which opens her eyes to the possibility of subversive resistance. She cannot reconcile the arbitrary racial distinctions that prevent her and Chambers from possessing subjectivities equal to white citizens' subjectivities. She compares her son to her master's infant son, Tom Driscoll:

> What has my po' baby done, dat he couldn't have yo' luck? He hain't done nuth'n. God was good to you; why warn't He good to him? Dey can't sell *you* down de river. I hates yo' pappy; he ain't got no heart—for niggers he haint, anyways. I hates him en I could kill him! . . . Oh, I got to kill my chile, dey ain't no yuther way,—killin' *him* wouldn't save de chile fum goin' down de river. Oh, I got to do it, yo' po' mammy's got to kill you to save you, honey. . . . But yo' mammy ain't gwyne to desert you,—no, no; *dah*, don't cry—she gwyne *wid* you, she gwyne to kill herself, too. Come along, honey, come along wid Mammy; we gwyne to jump in de river, den de troubles o' dis worl' is all over—dey don't sell po' niggers down de river over *yonder*. (14)

Roxy recognizes the futility of escaping the arbitrary confines of racist hegemony and sees death as the only way to transgress the overpowering network that enslaves her. Interestingly, by planning her suicide, Roxy exposes the possibility of resistance.

Foucault writes that the threat of death acknowledges and exposes the limits of power. Revolt in the face of death "is necessarily a tearing that breaks the thread of history and its long chains of reasons so that a man can genuinely give preference to the risk of death over the certitude of having to obey" ("On Revolution" 5). Roxy's decision to kill her family sets in motion a growing understanding of the nuances of resistance. By dressing herself and Chambers "like white folks" so they will look presentable in the afterlife, she recognizes the thinness of the barrier separating her from the holders of power. Regarding Chambers in Tom's clothing, she exclaims, "Now who would b'lieve clo'es could do de like o' dat? Dog my cats if it ain't all *I* kin do to tell t'other fum which, let alone his pappy" (16). Realizing the similarities between the children, Roxy switches them, making Chambers into Tom and turning Tom into Chambers. She justifies her act as being no different from the strategies that were used against her and her child: "'Tain't no sin—*white* folks has done it! It ain't no sin, glory to goodness it ain't no sin! *Dey's* done it—yes, en dey was de biggest quality in de whole bilin', too—*Kings!*" (16). Roxy's revelation about the strategies of appearance and her subsequent decision to switch the babies marks a sharp change in the forms of resistance previously used in the novel. Christopher Gair sees her appropriation of this strategy as an example of a slave woman merely wanting to emulate the model of the F.F.V. rather than trying to subvert it (200). Gair's assessment, though, ignores the reality of lived discourses of privilege, subjectivity, and survival to which Roxy would have access. While Roxy does conflate the codes of the F.F.V. with her own morality

on occasion, this reflects more on the strength of the codes than any attempt by Roxy simply to be like the "white folks."

If Roxy has doubts about the construction of social identities, her child's behaviors soon put them to rest. Her son (now known as Tom Driscoll) quickly assumes a position of dominance in her life and turns her lie into a truth:

> by the fiction created by herself, he was become her master; the necessity of recognizing this relation outwardly and of perfecting herself in the forms required to express the recognition, had moved her to such diligence and faithfulness in practicing these forms that this exercise soon concreted itself into habit; it became automatic and unconscious; then a natural result followed: deceptions intended solely for others gradually grew practically into self-deceptions as well; . . . the little counterfeit rift of separation between imitation-slave and imitation-master widened and widened, and became an abyss, and a very real one—and on one side of it stood Roxy, the dupe of her own deceptions, and on the other stood her child, no longer a usurper to her, but her accepted and recognized master. (20–21)

By acting out roles of the master/slave relationship, Roxy and Tom cement them into reality. Roxy's subversive tactics succeed but at a price. She loses her son, switching one master for another. "He was her darling, her master, and her deity, all in one," writes Twain, "and in her worship of him she forgot who she was and what he had been" (21). Through transgression, Roxy inadvertently weaves herself a new form of oppression in which her enslavement becomes an expression of religious and motherly devotion.

Because of the predominance of the discourses on race and heredity enforced by the F.F.V. code, Roxy struggles to break free from the system's stronghold despite her insights into its arbitrary nature. Because these discourses are so insular to Dawson's Landing, Roxy has no alternative discourses on which to draw, which leads to several contradictory observations on her part. She takes great pride in Tom's parentage, for example, telling him that his father, Colonel Essex, "was de highest quality in dis whole town—Ole Virginny stock, Fust Famblies, he was" (47). Later, when she learns Tom refused a duel in direct violation of the F.F.V. code, she exclaims "It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is!" (75). Despite these validations of racial and class hierarchies, Roxy remarks several times on the similarities between whites and blacks. When explaining maternal sacrifice to Tom, for example, she says, "In de inside, mothers is all de same. De good Lord He made 'em so" (86). Roxy's periodic conflation of the "truths" about race and status illustrate the strength of the discourses that Roxy knows to be constructed. Yet her

ability to simultaneously see beyond these arbitrary markers hints at weaknesses in the system.

For Roxy to slough off these totalizing discourses she needs to leave the spaces where they are most actively at work. When Percy Driscoll dies, he frees Roxy and she leaves Dawson's Landing to "see the world" as a steamboat chambermaid (25). Roxy's travels give her a new perspective on class, race, and gender. Eight years later, having lost her savings in a bank crash, she returns to finds that Tom's transformation into a privileged white slave-master has made him irresponsible and power-crazed. He has run up considerable gambling debts in St. Louis, and the judge has repeatedly written him in and out of his will. After Roxy asks Tom for the charity of a dollar, he rudely rebuffs her, and Roxy decides to invoke her previously hidden authority over him: "You has said de word. You has had yo' chance, en you has trompled it under yo' foot. When you git another one, you'll git down on yo' knees en *beg* for it!" (41–42). Roxy sees power in her creation of Tom's identity, just as the dominant discourse about Roxy's race has given whites power over her: "[H]er nature needed something or somebody to rule over, and he was better than nothing" (50). Roxy's appropriation of these strategies grants her access to the unique power such appropriation yields.

Roxy continues to exert her new power over Tom while wielding him as a tool of resistance. She blackmails him into giving her a share of his monthly pension and devises plans to extract him from a number of legal scrapes, usually requiring him to break more laws. Her knowledge of and willingness to work within existing power parameters comes to a head when she encourages him to sell her back into slavery to pay off his debts. Her decision springs from two equally powerful impulses: the desire to protect her child and her need to further the subversion of the dominant class by any means necessary:

> "Ain't you my chile? En does you know anything dat a mother won't do for her chile? Dey ain't nothin' a white mother won't do for her chile. Who made 'em so? De Lord done it. En who made de niggers? De Lord made 'em. In de inside, mothers is all de same." . . . .
>
> "It's lovely of you, mammy—it's just—"
>
> ". . . Laws bless you honey, when I's slavin' aroun' en dey 'buses me, if I knows you's asayin' dat, 'way off yonder somers, it'll heal up all de sore places, en I kin stan' 'em." (86)

Roxy's maternal love propelled her to switch the babies to protect her son from slavery, a subversion of the techniques used by the "*white* folks" (16). The fulfillment

of this subversion, a "loving" son in a position of white authority, gives her the strength to endure further humiliation at the hands of white power.

Roxy's faith in her subversive powers is shaken when Tom breaks their deal and sells her down the river. In this act, Roxy's earlier suspicions are confirmed. While not trusting Tom's character, her motherly devotion has blinded her to the possibility of his betrayal: "He sole me down de river—he can't feel for a body long," Roxy thinks when she sees a possible look of pity on Tom's face. "Dis'll pass en go" (92). Roxy resolves never to trust Tom again, but continues to manipulate him to satisfy her own ends. She orders Tom to tell the judge he needs a loan to buy back the mother he illegally sold. Tom, however, decides to rob the judge but instead murders him.

Tom's crime becomes the catalyst that starts David Wilson down the path toward resolving the strategic ambiguities at play in Dawson's Landing. Wilson is the only one who can match Roxy's strategic maneuvering, though he takes a different tact. While Roxy exacts a form of resistance yet maintains an image of docility, "Pudd'nhead" Wilson does the opposite. Rather than feigning docility, Wilson works as an outsider to introduce a new strategy that strengthens the old order. From the moment he arrives in town, Wilson confounds the other citizens because he deliberately confuses their ability to read him. With his first sentence, he humorously reverses the town's accepted discourse of knowledge only to find himself branded as an outsider:

> He had just made the acquaintance of a group of citizens when an invisible dog began to yelp and snarl and howl and make himself very comprehensibly disagreeable, whereupon young Wilson said, much as one who is thinking aloud—
>
> "I wish I owned half of that dog."
>
> "Why?" somebody asked.
>
> "Because, I would kill my half."
>
> The group searched his face with curiosity, with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that they could read. They fell away from him as from something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him. (6)

The town cannot understand Wilson in part because he comes from New York, a discursive environment foreign to Dawson's Landing. What he takes as a humorous quip instead brands him a "pudd'nhead," and the town diminishes this new foreign threat by stripping him of the possibility of power. "But for an unfortunate remark of his, he would no doubt have entered at once upon a successful

career at Dawson's Landing," Twain writes, illustrating how Wilson's perceived otherness prevents his infiltration of Dawson's Landing's power network (5–6).

I am not alone in understanding David Wilson as an outsider struggling with power. Eberhard Alsen argues the book's central theme evolves "out of David Wilson's twenty-three year fight for popularity and power, a fight in which his chief weapons are his superior intelligence and his astute knowledge of human nature" (136). Alsen strikes a Foucauldian note by discussing "superior intelligence" and "knowledge of human nature" as weapons in a fight for power. In Foucault's assessment, power is intricately associated with the formation of dominant discourses. For Foucault, power creates knowledge. Thus, Wilson's training in foreign discourses allows him to dispassionately observe and understand the strategies at work in Dawson's Landing. As Foucault explains:

> [W]e are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit. ("Two Lectures" 93)

Power generates and maintains discourses of truth in a given society. Keeping an arm's length from the truth of power in Dawson's Landing frees Wilson from having to reproduce the town's truth about identity. He organizes his collected observations into an understanding of the town's strategies for maintaining social order.

Wilson first observes Roxy from his upstairs window, struck by the contradiction between her white skin and her appearance as a black slave. Twain writes that a "fiction of law and custom" made Roxy and her child "negro" (9), and Wilson comments on this fiction when he sees her with Tom and Chambers: "They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too. . . . How do you tell them apart, Roxy, when they haven't any clothes on?" (10). Wilson immediately sees through the town's identity strategies, wryly commenting on the ironic juxtaposition of an essentially indistinguishable master and slave.

Wilson's next move reveals his determination to map the differences between individuals at the level of biology, rather than appearance. He takes fingerprints from Roxy and the children, labels and dates them, and stores these "records" in his collection of other prints. Wilson's methodology reflects what Foucault refers to as "designation" and "derivation" in the study of natural history:

> Natural history must provide, simultaneously, a certain *designation* and a controlled *derivation*. And just as the theory of structure superimposed

> articulation and the proposition so that they became one and the same, so the theory of *character* must identify the values that designate and the area in which they are derived. (*Order* 138).

The differences and similarities between natural objects in the modern era must stem from inherent characteristics innate to the objects. Of course, Foucault acknowledges that "the system is relative: it is able to function according to a desired degree of precision," but that is precisely the point (140). The system must be consistent. Dawson's Landing's system, based as it is on physical appearance, can no longer function at the "desired degree of precision" because of the effects of miscegenation. Dawson's Landing's theory of *character* forges a distinction between black and white subjects, but its terms of designation are that of a subject's visual surface, a designation intended to convey a subject's derived position relative to the community's genealogical system of inheritance and identity. In other words, Dawson's Landing's theory of *character* might also be called "the Code of the First Families of Virginia." By recording and methodologically organizing the town residents' fingerprints, Wilson takes the first step toward understanding and/or uncovering alternative designations of difference. In doing so, he has the potential to reinscribe the theory of *character* in Dawson's Landing's in another language—one of science, specifically biology.

Other areas of Wilson's life illuminate his predilection toward order and arrangement. His sarcastic calendar not only gives temporal structure to the book but also provides the reader a collection of detached observations about human nature. He writes, for example, "Consider well the proportion of things. It is better to be a young Junebug than an old bird of paradise" (36). The humor in these observations stems not from their inherent truth. Rather, we see the humor because Wilson reveals these truths by reversing our expectations. In fact, Wilson's calendar continues to give the reader an ironically subtle foreshadowing of his endgame: instead of undoing the power network in Dawson's Landing by revealing its fluidity, he actually provides a new set of biological strategies that support what the town "knows" to be true. The mutability of appearance threatens the "truth" of racial and social difference; Wilson strengthens that truth by shifting the dominant strategy.

Wilson eventually, and hesitantly, accepts access to power in the town. He befriends almost everyone, refusing to make enemies. When occasions arise that force him to choose sides, he does so in such a way as to seem drawn along by the forces of others. His most important friendships are with the power-holders of the town, but even these are chosen carefully. Judge Driscoll, his closest friend in the

town and an F.F.V. descendant, is a "free-thinker" who vehemently adheres to the code while maintaining an open mind to others' opinions (63). Wilson's association with Driscoll quickly accelerates his rise up the social ladder until the town elects him mayor. The honor is bittersweet, however, coming at the defamation of his rival and friend, Count Luigi Capello, whose presence as a foreigner and twin adds another level of confusion to the already disordered power structure. When the Judge slanders Luigi in public, insinuating that he is a confessed assassin, the Count loses the election. He and his brother then become the prime suspects when someone murders the Judge with their stolen knife. At the trial, Wilson agrees to defend the twins, another reversal of the expected behavior of one tasked with preserving the system of power.

Yet even Wilson is not immune to the potency of appearance and resemblance. Repeatedly he dwells on the memory of a young woman he saw in Tom Driscoll's bedroom the same night that an old woman was spotted leaving houses that had been robbed. Although he feels that she is connected to the murder and the recent spate of burglaries, at most he can only imagine her as a confederate to the thief or in disguise herself. Wilson correctly assumes the possibility of disguise, but he cannot bring himself to the realization that it was actually Tom Driscoll in drag: "The mysterious girl! The girl was a great trial to Wilson. If the motive had been robbery, the girl might answer, but there wasn't any girl that would want to take [the judge's] life for revenge. He had no quarrels with girls; he was a gentleman" (103). Even Wilson struggles to break from the power of suggestion that appearance holds over Dawson's Landing.

Despite its strength, the principle of similarity is not infallible. Wilson breaks the spell when he spots Tom's fingerprint on a water glass and matches it to a print left on the murder weapon. As the meaning of this dawns on Wilson, he exclaims, "Idiot that I was! Nothing but a *girl* would do me—a man in girl's clothes never occurred to me" (109). Wilson the Dawson's Landing citizen cannot crack the conundrum, but Wilson the scientist breaks through the hold of resemblance, tying the identity of the thief to his biology, not his façade. Wilson's practice of collecting fingerprints ushers in a new era of biological identification, in which mere physical appearance can no longer serve as the sole determinant of identity and position. Instead, the individual's biology ties the subject to his or her place in society.

As mayor-elect, Wilson now constitutes a key part of the social hierarchy threatened by the old strategies of appearance and behavior. He now has the social visibility to bring such a change to the public forum, but to do so he must integrate it into the space where such strategies are enforced. Therefore, in another

reversal of expectations, he solves the murder at the courthouse in front of the entire town during the twins' hearing, refocusing the trial on Tom Driscoll. By proving with his fingerprint collection that Tom killed his uncle, he also brings to light Tom's "true" identity as a black slave, restoring order to the social hierarchy and ushering in a new strategy with which to maintain it.

Wilson carves the inscription of power deeper into the human body through science instead of outward appearance, which Roxy's son manipulates to usurp the true Tom Driscoll. In an analysis of the shifting modes of knowledge in the novel, from palmistry to fingerprinting, Sarah Chinn notes that "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* shows us how the language of racialization changed, and how we can read those changes through the kinds of science that existed to 'prove' racial difference, and the methodologies those sciences adopted" (50). These shifting methodologies also reveal the shifting social realities that necessitate their invention. By reinscribing power at a deeper scientific level, Wilson introduces Foucault's analysis of discontinuity in which individuals are determined by supposedly innate differences (fingerprints, blood quanta) rather than an analysis of continuity in which they are connected by outward signifiers (handkerchiefs, skin color). As Foucault notes,

> We know that in the human sciences the point of view of discontinuity (the threshold between nature and culture . . .) is in opposition to the point of view of continuity. The existence of this opposition is to be explained by the bipolar character of the models: analysis in a continuous mode relies upon the permanence of function . . . , upon the interconnection of conflicts . . . , upon the fabric of significations . . . ; on the contrary, the analysis of discontinuities seeks rather to draw out the internal coherence of signifying systems, the specificity of bodies of rules and the decisive character they assume in relation to what must be regulated, and the emergence of the norm above the level of functional fluctuations. (*Order* 359)

An analysis of discontinuities not only allows for individual differences but also finds ways to transcend those differences. By bringing the analysis to the biological level, Wilson helps the existing societal hierarchy transcend the "functional fluctuations" inherent in a strategy of physical appearance. Miscegenation in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has changed the physical characteristics of social difference to such a point that all that is left is the clothing adorning the body, clothing that can be too easily replaced for the garments of another race or class.

Both Wilson and Roxy expertly understand and manipulate the strategies of power in Dawson's Landing. By invoking science in the conversation of identity,

however, Wilson strips Roxy of her tools of subversion, stabilizing the confusion that troubles the town. Order is restored, the murder is solved, Tom is sold "down the river" to pay off his debts, and Wilson assumes the mantel of responsibility as Dawson's Landing's newest mayor. Roxy experiences a more pyrrhic victory: while she suffers no legal consequences for her actions, Chambers continues Tom's pension when he resumes his position as rightful heir to the Driscoll estate. Chambers's generosity shames Roxy and "the spirit in her eye was quenched, her martial bearing departed with it, and the voice of her laughter ceased in the land" (120).

Wilson's success in restoring order while dissolving the strategy of appearances poses a troubling interpretation of the novel's attitudes toward racial identity. On the one hand, Wilson successfully exposes the hypocrisy of racial identification. On the other hand, he offers a solution designed to resolve the illogic with an inarguable science. Wilson's scientific solution has disquieting parallels to nineteenth-century attempts to "prove" the suitability of Africans and African Americans for slave work. In *The Peculiar Institution*, Kenneth Stampp describes an anxious post-bellum struggle to prove this suitability scientifically: "Doctors, scientists, and pseudo-scientists—phrenologists had a substantial following—found a physiological basis for allowing temperamental and intellectual differences" in African Americans while others found evidence in "the membranes, the muscles, the tendons, and . . . the negro's brain" (8). If Wilson's solution doesn't go so far as to establish the *character* of slaves as workers, perhaps his answer is even more stark: Wilson cements their *character* as nothing more than "black," forever marking their difference and status even when behavior or appearance could challenge such a distinction.

Wilson's insertion of a foreign strategy into the town's discourses raises questions about specific structures of racism in rural communities like Dawson's Landing and their relation to external/national structures. Twain's narrator makes clear to the reader the cruel absurdity and hypocrisy of the town's racial codes. After all, he sympathizes with the drastic conditions that lead them to steal from their masters and decry their "unfair show in the battle of life" (12). Too, Twain clearly intends for his reader to sympathize with Wilson, the New York-educated lawyer, introducing each chapter with an entry from "Pudd'nhead's" calendar and including winks at the ignorance of the town's folk who grapple with Wilson's sly, sardonic retorts. Thus, it leaves a particularly bad taste that Wilson emerges as the "hero," solving the murder and revealing the hypocritical distinctions of race, only to engrave these distinctions so deeply that one would have to slice off her fingers to escape them.

In naming the "sleepy," "comfortable," and "contented" Dawson's Landing (and similar areas) as the locus of antediluvian racial structures, Twain invites a metropolitan/cosmopolitan critique of this community (4). By inserting the cosmopolitan Wilson as the only figure with the cultural distance to observe the true nature of the town, Twain plays to common understandings of the relationship between the rural and national ideologies of progress. In such cases, rural areas reflect the national discourses of racism, and as the nation grapples with these discourses, it forces them onto, rather than removing them from rural areas as a way of distancing the nation from its own pervasive rhetorics of oppression. Of course, this equates to nothing more than willful ignorance and magical thinking. As James Loewen notes in *Sundown Towns*, an analysis of rural American towns with codified racial exclusion, rural racism is always and already a national problem. "So long as racial inequality is encoded in the most basic single fact in our society—where one can live," Loewen writes, "the United States will face continuing racial tension, if not overt conflict" (17). To focus on national concerns at the expense of the local may often mean that we inadvertently ignore discourses of oppression through the blind belief that "racism doesn't happen here." Even worse, it may lead us to bolster these discourses when we believe that we are immune to them, in much the same way that Wilson fixes Dawson Landing's "race problem" by making race more immutable and less avoidable.

By removing the arguably loose distinction of appearance, Wilson reinstates the mathematics that, through "a fiction of law and custom," made Roxy "a negro" (9). Susan Gillman points out that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* may "speak even more pointedly to the growing racism of its own area of the 1890s than to the race slavery abolished thirty years earlier" (88). But while Twain may have been intending a critique of late nineteenth-century miscegenation laws designed to regulate "relations between the races" and establish "rigid lines of segregation" (94), in the end the characters in the novel fully and finally identified as "black" end up punished for their usurpation while the white-identified characters are restored to power. Wilson ushers the town into a modern era in which the strategies and tactics of white supremacy are even more entrenched. The end result of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is not that biology informs identity but the converse: identity informs and constructs our biology, and these resulting identities have the power to enslave blacks or send them "down the river."

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