

## The Code Duello and the Reified Self in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

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In Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the code duello—sustained by the traditions of southern gentility and honor—has the power to trump laws, religious creeds, and moral principles. Placed highest among steps to social status, the code is a dominating cultural force in the antebellum southern town of Dawson's Landing. Based on borrowed and stagnant traditions, the code subverts the theories of growth, self-development, and self-recognition developed by Hegel, the German Romantic philosophers, and the later Frankfurt school thinkers. Rather than allow its adherents this self-development and logical reflection, the code requires self-negation and subjective regression. Aspects of the self that do not square with the code are silenced, resulting in a simplified consciousness and a diminished self-consciousness. The code, like the "commodity-structure" nature of capitalism in Georg Lukaács's *History in Class Consciousness*, "stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can 'own' or 'dispose of' like the various objects of the external world" (100). In short, the code results in the reification of the self. The power of the code to defeat personal or legal moral standards manifests itself throughout the novel—and most dramatically in the social rise and moral fall of David Wilson.

The epigraphic calendar entry for the prefatory "Whisper to the Reader" (each chapter opens with one or two such entries from "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar") foreshadows the moral fall to come: "There is no character, howsoever good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless" (Twain 55). Telling us that a character can be "destroyed by ridicule," even if that character is "good and fine," the calendar entry invites us to wonder who that person might be. Wilson, the most likely candidate, does indeed appear to be a good, likeable person at the novel's outset. He has "an intelligent blue eye that had frankness and

comradeship in it and a covert twinkle of a pleasant sort" (59). Wilson is intelligent, forthright, and friendly—certainly qualities of a person "good and fine." The word "comradeship" deserves special attention here, because it designates an identity bound to relationships with other people—with other consciousnesses. In order to exist as an independent identity, Wilson needs the mutual recognition of those around him. What he wants, in the words of Quentin S.J. Lauer's *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, is to enter "the community of self-consciousnesses which is the very truth of self-consciousness" (116). When first encountering the townspeople, however, Wilson makes a "fatal remark" (59), branding him a "Pudd'nhead," a mark of unintelligence that endures for twenty years.

His unfortunate utterance concerns "an invisible dog" that "began to make himself very comprehensively disagreeable." Wilson makes a joke about this unpleasant animal, saying, "I wish I owned half of that dog... Because I would kill my half" (59). The joke is directed against southern prejudice, criticizing the notions of racial purity sustaining the Jim Crow laws of Post-Reconstruction. Jim Crow laws had at their foundation a concept of biological reductionism, maintaining that a single drop of black blood justified identifying a person as black. All mulattoes, therefore, were legally treated as if they were 100 percent black. The laws annulled the whiteness in a man of mixed race. In other words, Jim Crow laws killed half of the man; hence Wilson's crack about killing half a dog. He is attacking racism and its proponents among the people of Dawson's Landing, alluding to their reifying practice of discarding half a man's identity, while knowing full well the impossibility of removing one half without destroying the whole man.

Wilson has potential at this early point in the novel. He seems to represent a challenge to the system. Said to be "twenty-five years old, college-bred," and having "finished a post-college course in an Eastern law school a couple of years before" (58), he surely possesses all the necessary credentials. He brings to the South northern ideas of justice and the legal training necessary to put them into practice; and northern law directly opposes the compromises undergirding the southern legal system. This opposition, of course, proved to be merely theoretical, as racially motivated laws eventually found legal sanction in the Supreme Court, making Jim Crow as much a national problem as a regional one. Still, there would appear to be some hope for Wilson—except that Twain has already warned us of impending destruction.

Wilson's problems arise in part from his being an outsider—a definite handicap in trying to alter the impacted perceptions in a small-town world. The people of Dawson's Landing do not get his joke. Instead, they "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." Wilson is a mystery to them; they cannot read his expression or interpret his words. In short, they lack the capacity to reflect logically. Trapped largely in "sense-certainty," the initial and most primitive stage of consciousness outlined in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, they live in a world based fundamentally on appearances. The joke, wholly lost on them (had they understood it, of course, they would have liked him even less), fuels the conclusion that he "'Pears to be a fool'" (59). Wilson, judged solely on appearance, is "gravely discussed" (60) and then ridiculed throughout the town. The townspeople negate the aspects of Wilson's consciousness that they cannot understand; and in doing so they deny him recognition and begin the reification process. As Lawrence Howe notes, Wilson is rendered "marginal and displaced" (183). This social displacement initiates his destruction and moral fall.

The first result of Wilson's public embarrassment comes when his career as a lawyer, at least as a man attempting to practice constitutional law, ends before it starts. Upon arriving in Dawson's Landing, Wilson "hired a small office down in the town, and hung out a tin sign," proclaiming himself to be, among other things, "Attorney and counsellor-at-law." Wilson gets no business, however, because "his deadly remark had ruined his chance—at least in the law. No clients came." Nobody wants his kind of law. Wilson takes down the sign, putting it "on his own house with the law features knocked out of it" (61). Wilson ceases to be a lawyer; and so begins the fading of readers' hopes for him to become a new and powerful reformer in the South. Wilson has lost more than his profession, however; he has disposed of, or "knocked out," a vital part of his self. Denied recognition—comradeship—by the town, Wilson loses the part of himself capable of practicing northern law. This is dangerous ground for Wilson because his failing struggle for recognition leaves him vulnerable to a form of Hegel's master/slave relationship—not because the townspeople possess the self-consciousness necessary to become masters (they exist in sense-certainty, unable even to recognize Wilson's point of view as being a point of view), but because Wilson begins to give up his subjectivity. Twain's narrator leaves us something to hold onto, though: "With Scotch patience and pluck he resolved to live down his reputation and work his way into the legal field yet" (61).

Wilson's dilemma surfaces quickly: he earned his compromised social position by holding true to his personal value system; can he live down his reputation while still holding onto what made him "good and fine"? If the answer is no, then he will be unable to practice the kind of law he learned in the North. What "legal field," then, will Wilson enter? To find business he will have to embrace the southern values of Dawson's Land-

ing. In short, Wilson must find a way to work within the culture that has outcast him. As Terry Pinkard notes in Hegel's *Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, Wilson must become a "being-for-another" and accept "that his own subjectivity—that what for him is an authoritative reason for belief or action—counts only in terms of how well it contributes to satisfying the master's desires and projects" (59).

To participate within this culture, however, Wilson will first have to understand its value system, which emerges vividly both in the town's "chief citizen," York Leicester Driscoll, and in its "recognised second citizen," Pembroke Howard. Driscoll is "very proud of his old Virginian ancestry," while Howard is "another old Virginian grandee with proved descent from the First Families" (57, 139). These men share pride in their heritage because "a recognised superiority attached to any person who hailed from Old Virginia; and this superiority was exalted to supremacy when a person of such nativity could also prove descent from the First Families of that great commonwealth." Driscoll and Howard own both of these requisites: "In their eyes it was a nobility" (138). The two distinguished citizens can trace their lines back to the "First Families [F.F.V., or First Families of Virginia]," which gives them status by birthright. Social rank in Dawson's Landing does not depend on actions in a world of free choices, but on the quality of a person's blood.<sup>1</sup>

Paralleling practices in the European aristocratic tradition that classed certain people as noble by reason of birth, and therefore above the common citizen, southern society has scant resonance with Wilson's northern background. America is not supposed to have a gentry class; but Twain tells us that "The Howards and Driscolls were of this aristocracy" (138). They are both members of the First Families of Virginia, and everyone of "The F.F.V. was born a gentleman" (139). This notion of a gentleman harkens back to pre-French-Revolution Europe, where one can be born into a title without possessing any other merits.

The idea of the "noble born," taken from Europe and imported to the southern colonies along with the people who settled there, is clearly explained in Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*. Outlining the ways in which a gentleman might earn himself the name of the "perfect courtier, without defect of any kind" (11), Castiglione says, "I would have our Courtier born of a noble and genteel family" (28). The term *courtier* is roughly synonymous with "gentleman," and Castiglione maintains that such status comes exclusively from birth to a noble family. The United States of course lacks an established nobility—Dawson's Landing has only been a town for about fifty years, hardly giving its citizens time to establish a hierarchical class system. Indeed, the United States fought a war of independence to free itself from a stagnant and repressive European aristocracy.

While many Americans threw off old chains, however, others held on: as V.G. Kiernan posits in *The Duel in European History*, "Americans were a turbulent democracy, in some ways ready to defy their ruling elites, but in as many ways wanting to imitate them, as they have continued to do more and more whole-heartedly" (311).

The duel and the code of honor are examples of major vices that Americans imported from their former masters. Class issues played perhaps the strongest role in the adoption of the code; and as in Europe, in America people tried to fence themselves off from those felt to be of inferior rank, thereby inventing a new breed of nobles. The designation "gentleman" had no legal standing in the United States; nonetheless, aristocratic principles and values win great attention—even legal credence—from most people in Dawson's Landing.

The laws governing Driscoll and Howard are "unwritten laws, and they were as clearly defined and as strict as any that could be found among the printed statutes of the land" (Twain 139). The "printed statutes" are the laws of David Wilson and his northern law schools, but they play little role in Dawson's Landing, especially not with its Driscolls and Howards. Instead, this sort of gentleman's "highest duty in life was to watch over that great inheritance and keep it unsmirched. He must keep his honour spotless. Those laws were his chart; his course was marked out on it; if he swerved from it by so much as half a point of the compass it meant shipwreck to his honour; that is to say, degradation from his rank as a gentleman" (139). The language of this passage suggests another parallel with Castiglione: "if ever in the least way he sullies himself through cowardice or other disgrace, [a gentleman] always remains defiled before the world and covered with ignominy" (32). Both passages maintain that the slightest variation from the duties of a gentleman will result in shipwrecked honor—shame and ignominy.

Driscoll knows that in Dawson's Landing a gentleman must tend to his honor at all times if he wishes to hold onto his noble status: "To be a gentleman—a gentleman without stain or blemish—was his only religion" (57). The one matter of utmost importance is to remain a gentleman, safe-guarding honor from each and every possible stain and blemish. The honor in question supports the theory of "horizontal honor" that Markku Peltonen develops in *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness, and Honor*. Unlike "vertical honor," which could be earned or increased through distinguished action, horizontal honor was conferred simply upon birth. Horizontal honor, according to Peltonen, was the birth-right of all gentlemen, an equalizing attribute among gentlemen courtiers. This honor was not something ranked or quantifiable like vertical honor; horizontal honor was a uniform feature of inherited status. A gentleman could not

increase his horizontal honor; he could only attempt to preserve it. Such preservation, however, was not achievable by individual endeavor; it depended on the opinion of others: "A gentleman's honour and reputation thus consisted of another gentleman's esteem of him" (38). Paradoxically, a gentleman was compelled to demonstrate his inherited and essentially internal superiority through visibly outward means. In short, horizontal honor was nothing more than worldly reputation based strictly on external appearance—sense-certainty again. If a gentleman lost his reputation, then his honor was likewise damaged or lost. The life-task of preserving it, then, might seem to pose certain problems; but defined traditional practices—the code duello—could resolve the difficulties.

As Twain makes abundantly clear, the preservatory dictums of the code did not always coincide with the duty of a Christian or of a United States citizen: "These laws required certain things of him which his religion might forbid: then his religion must yield—the laws could not be relaxed to accommodate religions or anything else. Honour stood first" (139). Honor counts more for men like Driscoll and Howard than anything else. It trumps religion, moral principles, and law. Like the words "Attorney and counsellor-at-law" on Wilson's sign, these must all be "knocked out" in an act of self-reification. Ironically, Driscoll is "judge of the county court" (57). The principal duty of a judge commits him to uphold the laws of the land; law, rather than the code, ought to be his "religion." Because honor subordinates law for Driscoll, he cannot possibly perform his job's duties properly.

By placing Driscoll atop the power structure, Twain ridicules the hypocrisy of the southern legal apparatus; but he does not stop there, portraying Pembroke Howard as "the great lawyer" of Dawson's Landing. Howard follows the Judge's "religion," being "a fine, brave, majestic creature, a gentleman according to the nicest requirements of the Virginian rule," 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" (57-58). The "Virginian rule" is the code of honor that gentlemen follow in order to retain their status. Readers must conclude that the town's judge and lawyer are subject to forces subversive to constitutional law. Both are dysfunctional in terms of their professions. All that is missing from this bankrupt legal system is a "bought" jury.

The people of Dawson's Landing fulfill this role. We know that they embrace the value system of the code because they have made Driscoll and Howard their most respected citizens. The Judge is "respected, esteemed, and beloved by all the community" (57), and Howard has already been described as the "second citizen." Driscoll and Howard rank above every-

one else by virtue of the authority of southern gentility (incorporating both the code of honor and the code duello). The people ostensibly possess the power to say what is honorable; they could easily deliver a different verdict on the two chief citizens of Dawson's Landing. No such thing occurs. They conform to old, borrowed, and romanticized customs, seeming quite eager to embrace a value system that confines them to the bottom of the social ladder. In *Mark Twain on the Loose*, Bruce Michelson notes, "The patricians of Dawson's Landing are a people burdened by history, never strengthened or empowered by it, never freed of it to become something different, something more than a name" (191). History and the code, in short, subvert growth and result in self-negation—ironically, this is true even though the town's "history" does not reach back beyond the birth of its citizens.

The townsfolk, in agreement that Driscoll and Howard are their most respected citizens, serve as a figurative jury in Twain's portrayal of the southern legal system. They also function literally as a jury at the scene where Wilson makes his half-a-dog joke, going to great lengths to justify their opinion of Wilson. They do not begin by calling Wilson a "Pudd'nhead"; they reach this derogation only after sustained discussion. They retire "into privacy" (59) to speak of these matters, like a jury removed to chambers when deciding a verdict. In keeping with this simile, Twain does not mention any of their names, referring to them instead by number. They have anonymity, like the members of a jury, and by the end of deliberation, "Mr. Wilson stood elected. The incident was told all over the town, and gravely discussed by everybody. Within a week he had lost his first name; Pudd'nhead took its place" (60).

Although the word "elected" denotes a political process whereby people possess power to cast votes, the members of a jury can also be said to vote when they determine guilt or innocence. In this case, they vote on whether Wilson should be judged a "Pudd'nhead", and their decision is called a verdict. Strikingly, they need no judge to sentence him. Public opinion makes law in Dawson's Landing, and the distorted system of southern law arrives at a sentence based on appearances ("Pears to be a fool") that "was to continue to hold its place for twenty long years" (60) on David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson. Southern traditions thereby subvert northern legal scruples.

Wilson does not want to give up the fight, though, as he has "resolved to live down his reputation," thereby earning the recognition—a recognition entirely hollow—of the town. To do this he must penetrate the culture of Dawson's Landing; he must embrace the code, with its chief concerns of honor and reputation. The novel suggests that in Dawson's Landing the most obvious course of action for a gentleman is to fight a duel in defense of his code. As Kiernan observes, "America had an elite of men who could claim, by birth or education . . . a status like that of the gentleman in England. They

wanted to preserve their eminence, and duelling could be one means" (307). The duel provided Americans eager to distinguish themselves as the social elite with a means to show their merit. Interestingly, Kiernan establishes that lawyers were prime candidates to fill the rosters of America's gentry.<sup>2</sup> As one does not have to be born noble to become a lawyer, the upper class in America, unlike in Europe, was built largely on the shoulders of the educated, not the well-born. As time passed, these new-made gentlemen took on the aura of the noble-born; but Twain knew their presumptions to be mere posturing. He satirizes this invented class by putting the legal forces of Dawson's Landing atop the social pyramid.

In order to ridicule further the residents of Dawson's Landing and the American tendency to ape aristocratic Europe, Twain interweaves an Italian sub-plot.<sup>3</sup> With the impending arrival of the Italian twins, Luigi and Angelo, the whole town of Dawson's Landing gets "all ablush with joyous excitement" (87). Everyone holds romanticized versions of what it means to be foreign (Italian in this case), and they all want to be a part of the approaching glorious spectacle: "The letter [announcing the twins' intent to visit] was read and re-read until it was nearly worn out; everybody admired its court and gracious tone, and smooth and practised style, everybody was sympathetic and excited" (88). Even the writing of the twins sounds gentlemanly; upon their arrival, they appear "the handsomest, the best dressed, the most distinguished-looking pair of young fellows the West had ever seen" (89). Indeed, the twins would seem to belong to the highest aristocratic echelon; they tell Aunt Patsy and Rowena (their hostesses) "We were of the old Florentine nobility" (90), making them candidates to follow the code by birth. Their status is higher even than that of the F.F.V., for the twins do not have to trace their roots back across the Atlantic. They are the genuine article, or so they claim (in a town built on appearance, nothing more is needed), and soon everyone wants to brush up against these "fine foreign birds" (92).

The twins remain a hot commodity in Dawson's Landing, and not only with the common people, as "Judge Driscoll had the good fortune to secure them for an immediate drive, and to be the first to display them in public" (96). The Judge feels affinity with all followers of the code, taking enormous pride in the presence of the twins. He does his best to impress the Italians, telling them "all about his several dignities, and how he had held this and that and the other place of honour or profit, and had once been to the legislature, and was now president of the Society of Freethinkers" (97), and he invites the twins to the next meeting of his cherished society. Surprisingly, Wilson is the second of the club's two members.

Wilson has been labeled a "Pudd'nhead" by everyone in the community except the Judge, the town's leading citizen. The Judge considers Wilson to



be his friend, "and claimed that he [Wilson] had a mind above the average" (86). Not everyone regards Wilson as an outsider; he has the friendship and support of the "chief citizen" of Dawson's Landing—here is a relationship not based on reification. This might lead us to believe that Wilson's original value system holds the potential to reach people caught up in social status and honor. Although Michelson makes an apt point, positing that Wilson seems a fool for "accepting an idea that two people who think freely and heretically need to bang gavels and conduct formal business" (198), perhaps Wilson might have found eventual social redemption without trading his principles for those of the code. The Judge does not hold his eventual failure to do so against him, however; and the Freethinkers meeting goes over well with the twins, earning Wilson a pair of new friends. Wilson's three best friends in Dawson's Landing at this point are all professed gentlemen, suggesting that "Pudd'nhead" might soon follow suit and join their ranks. He has been waiting twenty years to slip into the good graces of the community, and the arrival of the twins supplies him with the chance to do so.

Wilson's long-awaited day, his chance to salvage his reputation and work back into the legal field, comes when Tom Driscoll (nephew of the Judge) makes a wise-crack at the expense of Luigi in a town gathering, after which the latter's "southern blood leaped to the boiling-point in a moment under the sharp humiliation of this insult delivered in the presence of four hundred strangers" (135). Southern and Italian blood are conflated here, both deriving from the same stock when it comes to fiery dispositions that seek revenge for minor insults. Luigi, for example, will not stand for Tom's insult; he kicks the young Driscoll in the rear, sending him into the front row of the "Sons of Liberty" meeting.

Tom does not accept humiliation lightly either; but instead of retaliating physically, he takes Luigi to court. Doing so, however, Tom does not follow the code and thereby shames his family. When the Judge hears the news, "the old man shrank suddenly together like one who has received a death-stroke" (140). Refusing at first to believe the story, the Judge confronts Tom, hoping to clear things up. Learning that he has indeed been told the truth, "The Judge's wrath began to kindle, and he burst out: 'You cur! You scum! You vermin! Do you mean to tell me that blood of my race has suffered a blow and crawled to a court of law about it?'" (141). The Judge, supposedly the advocate of the law, views Tom's recourse to the legal process as horrific. In his mind, only a duel can save Tom from dishonor. He demands to know which twin delivered the insult, and upon hearing "Luigi," the Judge asks, "'You have challenged him?'" as if the response were a given. Tom replies negatively, and the Judge responds with a command: "'You will challenge him to-night. Howard will carry it.'" When Tom refuses, the Judge rages again: "'There it is, shreds and fragments once more—my will. Once more

you have forced me to disinherit you, you base son of a most noble father! Leave my sight! Go—before I spit on you!” (142). Ashamed that a coward now blackens his lineage, the Judge can think of nothing but expelling Tom from the family.

Tom certainly is a coward. By choosing to take Luigi's act of physical abuse into the courtroom (as opposed to the dueling arena), however, Tom does the right thing and wins the case. Here Wilson steps in, getting his first case in Dawson's Landing. Wilson loses, representing Luigi; but by siding with the twins and against Tom, he defends the code with the law—a step toward endorsing the code itself. Wilson cannot understand why the Judge even permitted Tom to take the case to court: “It's no place for it” (145); and upon learning that Judge Driscoll had no knowledge of the event, he says, “Tom, I am ashamed of you! I don't see how you could treat your good uncle so. I am a better friend of his than you are; for if I had known the circumstances, I would have kept that case out of court until I got word to him and let him have a gentleman's chance” (146).

Many critics have failed to see anything wrong with Wilson's comments at this juncture. Arlin Turner claims that Wilson's indictment of Tom simply exposes the latter's cowardice. When he says Pudd'nhead Wilson “stands outside the social structure of Dawson's Landing and thus speaks from an uncompromised position” (131), Turner—like Forrest G. Robinson when he calls Wilson an “automaton, an utterly dispassionate isolato” (227)—misses the fact that Wilson has begun to speak in the language of the code. Henry B. Wonham is largely correct when he says that Wilson's apparent detachment dissolves to reveal “his ongoing complicity with the novel's arch legislators as soon as he lowers his deadpan mask in the climactic recognition scene” (101); but I further maintain that his “complicity” is traceable to this scene. The “gentleman's chance” mentioned above denotes the opportunity to send a challenge to duel. Wilson, like the Judge, asserts that the code transcends the authority of constitutional law. Wilson, outside the social structure of the town until this moment, now begins to lose himself in the decorum of honor and the code duello, falling closer to moral destruction. He is quite compromised.

Wilson's appearance on the town's legal scene marks his first public defense of the code, and the town compensates him for the action. The reward comes as a request from the “Democratic party” (150) asking him to run for mayor: “It was the first attention which Wilson had ever received at the hands of any party; it was a sufficiently humble one, but it was a recognition of his *debut* into the town's life and activities at last; it was a step upward, and he was deeply gratified” (151). Wilson's “debut” may be a step upward socially, but equally certainly it is a step down morally. He finally gets his “recognition,” but it is the “one-sided type of social recogni-

tion that makes up the relationship of master and slave" (Pinkard 60). He has sold out his principles in exchange for popularity. This exchange does not matter to him, though, because his honor dominates and enslaves his concerns.

Given the high import of honor to the judge, it is of little wonder that he cannot disregard Tom's insult to his heritage. The only traditional remedy requires a challenge to Luigi and a duel. Howard carries the challenge; when he returns, he claims to have the best news in the world. Old Driscoll immediately knows he has a duel on his hands, "and the light of battle gleamed joyously in the Judge's eye." The Judge, about to meet the twin on the field of battle, sets himself to kill or be killed if necessary. He holds no ill will towards the young Italian, however: "'He's a darling! Why, it's an honour as well as a pleasure to stand up before such a man... A rare fellow, indeed; an admirable fellow'" (152). The Judge respects Luigi, thinking him a "darling," and yet he insists that honor requires him to undertake the duel. This requirement exists because the code forces him to negate Luigi's consciousness. The Judge does not view him as a person, but as the object in his stale tradition. To borrow once more from Lukaács, the "relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity'" (1). Stripping Luigi of subjectivity, the Judge reifies his opponent.

The Judge willingly meets the twins in a duel to settle their quarrel of honor with "threeshots apiece" (153). Tom, strikingly, does not care about all this, not even wondering as to the origin of the gun shots he hears. Dueling seems ludicrous to him. But the same is not true for Roxy, his birth-mother: once again he is chastised for opting out of the code when the latter, who seems oddly invested in the town's honor culture, says, "'En you refuse' to fight a man dat kicked you, 'stid o' jumpin' at de chance!... You has disgraced yo' birth. What would yo' pa think o' you? It's enough to make him turn in his grave'" (157). Roxy is the last person we would expect to find advocating the code. A former slave, she has never received any of the privileges such as come with Tom's Virginia heritage. A slave when she conceived Tom (the town is ignorant of the latter's true parentage because they do not know that, in Twain's "changeling" plot, Tom was switched at birth with Chambers, his half-brother), Roxy bore the child out of wedlock, neither having help from the father—the Judge's brother, Percy Northumberland Driscoll—nor the supposed advantages attached to F.F.V. status. Defend the code she does, however, and Twain thereby shows that reification extends to all members of the community—even to those who, like Roxy, profit nothing from it. True of everyone but Tom, the gambler-thief who eventually murders the Judge during a botched robbery, their capacities for weighing evidence and achieving rational judgments have atrophied in the face of class conventions

and the appearances that register for sense-certainty.

The whole town seems to favor battles of honor: "The people took more pride in the duel than in all the other events put together, perhaps. It was a glory to their town to have such a thing happen there. In their eyes the principals had reached the summit of human honour" (163). "In their eyes" implies that, being guided by sense-certainty and not reason, they have not yet experienced principles becoming the "summit" of honor. Still, most people in Dawson's Landing would likely label anyone a "Pudd'nhead" who disagrees with them. Wilson no longer faces any such danger, however; seemingly he has embraced the practices of the code, serving as Luigi's second in the duel. His rewards, great for defending the code from the outside of tradition (with the law), grow grander once he moves to the inside. By taking part in the duel, Wilson grabs some of the public glory for himself: "Even the duellists' subordinates came in for a handsome share of the public approbation: wherefore Pudd'nhead Wilson was suddenly become a man of consequence. When asked to run for the mayoralty Saturday night he was risking defeat, but Sunday morning found him a made man and his success assured" (164). Wilson's success in this and the previous scene highlights a further implication of dueling tradition. As well as a means of maintaining "spotless" honor and designating social status, the duel functions as a road to social and political power. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown says in *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, "Duels were a method for ascertaining who should exercise the power that the community of men was willing to accord the winners" (357). "Winning" seems to be of little importance in Twain's version: mere willing participation is more than adequate. Wilson is rewarded increased social status. His moral condition, though continues to decline as his social stock rises.

No more duels occur in this novel. Wilson, however, no longer needs the compromises they demand to continue his fall, which culminates in the final courtroom scene of the twins' murder trial. Having become a staunch advocate of the code, and thereby mapping "his own point of view completely on to that of the master's" (Pinkard 60), Wilson is ready to take up his old position of lawyer again, now fully trained in the compromises of southern law. Twain mocks this supposed system of distributive justice once more as Wilson conducts his case in a carnivalesque, thoroughly unprofessional manner. Wilson, fully aware that Luigi and Angelo (his clients) stand falsely accused of murdering the Judge<sup>4</sup>, chooses to present his exculpatory evidence through an elaborate display of an arcane knowledge of fingerprinting. As part of the show Wilson commands the accused to make their marks on a window pane, and then asks the jury to compare these with his previously prepared set of pantagraph copies. He also has the jury "compare the fingerprints of the accused with the finger-prints left by the assassin

[on the murder weapon]—and report" (220). The eyes of the untrained jury are thereby deemed sufficient to clear the twins of murder, even as Wilson himself exonerates them of the crime: "These men are innocent. I have no further concern with them" (221).

Tom is convicted in a similar manner. Wilson himself asserts that "there is no need" to put the former on the stand because "he has confessed." In fact, Tom has only "turned his ashen face imploringly towards the speaker, made some impotent movements with his white lips, then slid limp and lifeless to the floor" (223). Tom may appear to be guilty (as he indeed is), but adequate rational reflection on the evidence does not equate to reliance on appearances—notions of honor, the code, and southern legal practices do. This makes no difference to anyone involved, however; and therefore we witness yet another scene in which no judge or rational judgment need function (the first occurs when Wilson is convicted of being a "Pudd'nhead"). Only the imagined will of the people counts; Wilson wins by controlling the crowd's response—in brief, he manipulates their sensory certainty. Reasoned dialogue does not occur here; as Joe Fulton says, "Pudd'nhead wants no response, just acceptance and agreement" (137). Now it is Wilson who forces recognition—his point of view—upon his peers, instead of the other way round.

The verdict delivers a final blow to any pretense of a legal system. The moral claim has been forgotten; and Tom remains unpunished for committing murder. Instead, Wilson unveils Tom as a black man in disguise, in what Fulton terms an attempt "to expunge the racial other from consciousness" (136). In consequence, the murderer is sold down the river as a slave. Many critics have attacked Twain for concluding the novel as he does: in extreme satire, almost farce. Many claim that Twain pulls his punches in the end, failing to deliver on the harsh social criticisms he has been building. Robinson, for example, writes of a "discontinuity between the dark central chapters and the strangely up-beat conclusion" (24). Often, as Glen M. Johnson points out in his analysis of the "New Americanists," this ending—as well as other scenes in the novel—earns Twain and/or his text(s) the charge of being complicit with the rampant racism of the day. Twain's supposed failure to shape a cohesive conclusion even seems to some readers to emanate from his attachment to Wilson's character. Eric J. Sundquist maintains that the role of David Wilson was "clearly entangled in the performance of Mark Twain the author" (59), and Robinson suggests that Wilson "makes drama out of a murder mystery that pleases the crowd, completes his rise to respectability and power, and distracts everyone—himself, Mark Twain, and the audience inside and 'outside' the novel" (44). Surely Robinson correctly directs our attention to Wilson's distracting role. Regardless, I side with George E. Marcus in maintaining that "Wilson perhaps becomes pudd'nhead in the

judgment of the reader and in that of his creator" (205).

Wilson certainly does "rise to respectability and power" at the end of the novel; he emerges as the mayor of Dawson's Landing, and "all his sentences were golden now, all were marvellous. His long fight against hard luck and prejudice was ended; he was a made man for good" (224). But such an ending cannot be called "happy"; rather, it is a mock tragedy.<sup>5</sup> Wilson may be a socially "made man" inside the novel; but he has wholly collapsed morally, selling his soul in order to win the approval of a crowd. Moreover, his self-consciousness ceases to develop, in fact regressing; he denies his own freedom by confining himself within conventions. As James M. Cox summarizes, Wilson ends up coming "not to destroy the society but to occupy, examine, and finally administer it" (20).

Wilson kills half the dog when he reifies Tom as black, eliminating his whiteness, and comes full circle from his position at the beginning of the novel, thereby subverting any self-development by reverting to a denial of self-consciousness. Leland Krauth attempts to reconcile this dramatic character shift by positing Wilson as a "radically fragmented self that challenges the traditional conception of a unified human identity" (209). The Wilson who ends the novel, then, is not necessarily the Wilson of the beginning or middle. My reading is somewhat different: Wilson is quite altered, but this shift has been effected by the hegemonic social structure of Dawson's Landing. The cultural norms and assumptions of society have had their way with a character who was once "good and fine," leaving a self stripped of consciousness—a shell of failed possibilities.

James E. Caron is right in saying that "the laugh is on everyone" (468), alluding to the other characters in the novel. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* ends badly for everyone inside the novel. As readers, we too have been set up to take a fall. When Roxy says, "'Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' soul'" (157), we cannot avoid asking whether she is right (a point evidenced by the work of many critics). Asking this question kills half the dog, however, and re-enacts Wilson's moral fall. Twain also entices us to side with Wilson by making Tom so despicable. We dislike Tom, thinking that maybe he gets what he deserves when he is sold down the river (he sells his own mother down the river only a few chapters prior). We want to support Wilson because he is the mild-mannered underdog; but as soon as we take his side, we begin to buy into the code. Twain warns of this impending misstep in the calendar entry appearing before the final courtroom scene: "April 1.—This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty-four" (211). Referencing April Fool's Day, Twain essentially brands his audience as a pack of fools. When speaking of Twain's irony-laced mode of humor, David L. Smith notes, "it unsettles us because it subverts our desire for easy

virtue and instead implicates us in the moral contradiction that it exposes" (161): in the end, no one fully escapes judgment.

Twain warns of Wilson's fall in his "Whisper to the Reader" and again before the final court scene. He also illustrates repeatedly that training, habit, and self-conscious growth make the man—not the origin of the blood flowing in his veins. Yet these indicators are partially buried, laid about our feet as snares. An attentive reading that analyzes Twain's story for what it is—a Faustian exchange of principle for power—exposes the network of subtle traps within Pudd'nhead's surface-world, where a person who "pears to be a fool" may indeed become one in the effort to win public approval.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Twain mocks the potency of the F.F.V. blood by portraying all of the leading families in the town as barren and/or sickly.

<sup>2</sup>In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville notes, "If I were asked where I see the aristocracy in America, I would answer without hesitation that I do not find it among the rich, who share no common bond. The American aristocracy congregates in the courtroom: at the bar or on the bench" (309).

<sup>3</sup>According to Markku Peltonen, "The duel of honour and its theory came to England [and hence America] as part of the Italian Renaissance notion of the gentleman and courtier. The duel of honour, in other words, emerged as an integral part of the Italian Renaissance theory of courtesy" (18).

<sup>4</sup>Tom unwittingly frames Angelo and Luigi for the crime when he leaves behind the murder weapon, a knife which he has previously stolen from them. This apparently incriminating evidence is compounded by the fact that the twins have a motive: the Judge has publicly dishonored them by calling Luigi an "assassin" and then subsequently refusing the challenge to a second duel.

<sup>5</sup>James E. Caron, among others, points out that the novel originally appeared under the title, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

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