

TOM DRISCOLL AS THE MANIPULATOR OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN *PUDDN'HEAD WILSON*

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Abstract: Expanding on the critical discussion of the ambiguity of slave identity in Mark Twain's *Puddn'head Wilson* put forward by Rowe (137), I want to argue that by exploiting the weakness of transitional capitalist society, the white slave character Tom Driscoll (Valet de Chambre) manipulates cultural identifiers in the form of cultural and social capitals, in order to subvert power from the ruling white elite, and ultimately elevate his societal statuses. I propose that his subversion of power, must be defined within the specific discourse of that setting, and this setting allows Tom, normally a black slave, to redefine himself as a white aristocratic member of the society. Tom's 'passing' as a white aristocrat was initiated and propelled into being by his mother, Roxy, by exploiting main cultural identifiers which are parameters of cultural and social capitals. The first is Tom's racial likeness to white slave masters which enabled him to supplant the true heir of the Driscoll's family. The second is the objectified cultural capital of physical appearance such as speech and manners, to gain and maintain outward appearance of a white aristocrat. And the third, his conformity to the lofty ideals of lifestyle, manner, language, and honor, are required to pass as a member of the Driscoll family. Tom can then function as a sum of all Driscoll's cultural, social, and economic capitals, and he was able to 'steal' the name of a powerful Driscoll family. These are all maintained by Tom in order to rob the Driscoll's of their capitals, and ultimately, their power.

The slave identity theme occupies a prevalent position in Twain's relatively less known novel, *Puddn'head Wilson*. In this novel, the main antagonist, a slave character, Tom, was portrayed as having all the racial qualities of a white person, yet he was considered as a black slave by the town folk of Dawson's Landing, Missouri. Twain's portrayal of the ambiguity of slave identity was unique, in that it blatantly portrays the absurdity of society's definition of slaves, as John Rowe (1990: 137) has analyzed. Rowe also discussed how culture-related signifiers, such as dress, plays a part in defining a slave. Although Rowe focuses more on the speculative elements of *Puddn'head Wilson*, I found his brief analysis of Tom's exploitation of the culture-related signifiers as a mean of switching between ambiguous identities, as fascinating and significant for the discussion of the central theme of slave identity in the novel for his own benefit. I want to expand on this by arguing that by exploiting the weakness of transitional capitalist society, the white slave character Tom (Valet de Chambre) manipulates cultural identifiers in the form of cultural and social capitals. Tom's objective was to exploit his multiple identities to subvert power from the ruling white elite and ultimately elevate his societal statuses.

Certainly, the theme of ambiguity can be applied to the main antagonist in the novel, Tom Driscoll. Tom exploited many elements of his ambiguous identity, including cultural signifiers of dress, behavior, and even racial features such as skin color, in trying to accomplish his attainment of power. In a way, it can be argued that Tom, actually a negro slave, could rise and attain power over the white folk because he 'play' upon these ambiguous cultural signifiers.

Concerning this, the cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu has identified these cultural signifiers, as capitals. Such uses of cultural signifiers, such as dress code or refined behavior, have been categorized as social and cultural forms of capital. Bourdieu defined social capital as capital earned through social

channels: social networks of influence, support, group membership and relationship (2011: 83). Cultural capital is in the form of non-financial advantages a person has from formal institutional education, or inherited informal cultural 'heritage,' and it can also take on an 'objectified' physical signifiers, which can then be converted to economic/financial capital (Bourdieu, 2011: 81-88). These forms of capital are prominently portrayed in the novel, and I intended to expand the already proliferate discussion on the novel, by focusing on how these forms of capital work in the story, through Tom's ambiguous identities.

Commenting on this "tangled skein" of identities, Susan Gillman claims that an attempt to unravel this matter must start with a discussion on the cultural context where this story is based (1990: 87). Gillman's opinion serves as a good starting point in the analysis here, as I believe that Tom was produced by his cultural circumstances, and that his actions, compliance, and subversion of power, must be defined within the specific discourse of the setting.

Tom's ambiguous identity springs from the societal setting that allows it to happen. Rowe's analysis has interpreted the setting of the novel, Dawson's Landing, as a transitional capitalist society, moving from rural to the industrial stage (1990: 141). In his discussion, he finds that the structure of power is actually reverting to feudalism, instead of democracy (1990: 138). This society employs a race-based power mapping, with slavery being reaffirmed more strictly. Racial features are, therefore, considered important, and also drawing on the findings of Rowe's analysis here, the ambiguity of racial features can be said to result from such transitional quality. Because the society was at the moment of redefinition and uncertainty, it creates the necessary gap by which white slaves, such as Tom, redefine themselves.

Tom is a black slave who is being redefined, and is able to redefine himself as a white person. The racial features of Tom were Caucasian, yet the more society-accepted legal definitions of him, is a black slave by birth. The reason was that he was a one-thirtieth black, being born from his mother Roxy, one-sixteenth black, and his father Colonel Essex, a 'pure' white person. As such, already Tom generates a dual identity, and it results purely from loopholes of the society's legal definition of a slave. The legal interpretation of Tom's blackness is based on racial qualities, yet at the same time, Tom's racial qualities regards him extremely similar to a pure white person. Even his own mother, Roxy, and other white people cannot identify his blackness ever since Tom was a baby (Clemens, 1980: 14-6). The legal qualification for Tom to be considered as 'black' is then rendered inapplicable because the legal basis is ambiguous. Tom's whiteness, in this case, serves as a very powerful cultural capital: it enables him freedom over racial laws of slavery, by allowing him to pass as a white person. Adding Bourdieu's perspective here, such inherited traits, like Tom's racial qualities, serves to propel him socially and culturally; it enables him to earn power beyond what is normally available to him (83-4). Certainly, the result of this is clearly seen in the novel, as Tom's life was pampered, even spoiled. Tom's racial traits enabled him to pass as the heir of a white aristocratic family, the Driscolls, and thus he got every benefit that a black slave must not. Tom's racial traits serve as cultural capitals that enabled him to walk over the cultural, legal boundaries which, in Mary Esteve's words, is defined as "slippery, contradictory, and often cruel social logic that enabled racial fictions of law and custom." This understanding also adds to Susan Gillman's notion of identity confusion in the story as Twain's way of challenging the ridiculous 'social and legal fiction of slavery,' symbolized in the anomaly of 'the pure white slave' such as Tom (Clemens, 1980: 89).

It must be noted here that Tom's 'passing' as a white aristocrat was not initiated by himself, but rather it was initiated and propelled into being by his mother, Roxy. When Roxy planted his slave son, Valet de Chambre, as 'Tom Driscoll,' she was very aware of the potential cultural capital that his son have. She was surprised in learning that the baby Valet de Chambre and the real Tom Driscoll are very similar, and then a "strange light dawned on her eyes" and she dressed Valet as 'Tom' and Tom as 'Valet,' and addressed Valet, her own son, as 'Master Tom Driscoll' from then on (Clemens 14-6).

By doing this, Roxy has acknowledged three main cultural and social capitals, which are the aforementioned racial likeness, the objectified cultural capital of dress / clothing, and most important here, the social capital in the form of modified behavior (deference) as the result of Driscoll's family name. These cultural capitals become invested in Tom. This change of identity was made possible by the white racial features, and it was initiated by Roxy for 'rescuing' her son from the menace of white people's slavery (Clemens 15). However, what is more important, the reason Roxy did it was so that she "was happy; happy and proud, for this was her son, her nigger son, lording it among the whites and securely avenging their crimes against her race" (Clemens 22). Roxy's purpose was to enable Tom, her

negro son, to attain power over the white people, and she enacted this act of vengeance by damning the Driscolls, robbing them of an heir, and subverting their aristocratic powers to Tom. It is based on this understanding that each of the three socio-cultural capitals given to Tom by Roxy (racial features, dress, and family name), can be given adequate explanation; the cultural capitals were utilized as a means to subvert white power.

To begin with, Roxy's attempt at switching identities was relatively successful, mostly because she was, firstly, in the position to redefine the physical signifiers of socio-cultural capital that can reveal her son's true slave identity. Roxy's position, as the caretaker of both the real Tom Driscoll and her own son Valet de Chambre, enjoys a privileged position. She was the sole judge by which the identities of the babies may be construed since everybody else considers Valet and Tom to be very similar in appearance. She was conscious of the switching attempt and did everything in her power to make the switch convincing, by altering Tom's clothes. Tom's clothing occupies a significant position here, as it is what Bourdieu has interpreted as an outward or external symbol of wealth, and, in this case, family membership and inheritance (2011: 83-4).

When she performed the switch, Roxy clothed Tom "in one of Thomas a Becket's snowy, long baby gowns, with its bright blue bows and dainty flummery of ruffles" (Clemens, 1990 14). This clothing then has the significance of symbolizing wealth, as compared to the coarse linen clothes Roxy dressed her baby with. Roxy recognized that this baby clothing are even acceptable by Heaven's standard, and is comparable in quality to the so-called 'expensive dress' she was wearing at the time. More importantly, the dress carries with it social capital, in the form of membership with the Driscoll family. This is because wearing the clothes carries Tom (Thomas a Becket) Driscoll's identity, the pampered future heir of the Driscolls. This is a very significant rise for the real Valet, because he was enabled to enjoy all the cultural, social, and economic capital of Tom Driscoll. He was elevated to the heightened status of the elite member of Driscoll's family. As Bourdieu recognizes in his understanding of social capital, the application of the family common name is an inherited capital gained from the family (86). In Tom's case, he illegally 'steals' the Driscoll's family name and, in line with Bourdieu's understanding of social capital (86), gained the ability to mobilize and exploit the social networks of the white people. He also gained the social ability to exercise his *noble* status and authority over common white people.

In spite of his noble status A significant feature of the Tom here is his seemingly evil nature. In his childhood, Tom was an abusive and malicious boy (Clemens 19-22). Later in his life, Tom later grew up to be a menacing, pretentious, and idle person (23-4). At the end of the story, Tom was revealed as evil, cowardly criminal and murderer (94). His wicked nature does not seem compatible with the Driscolls, who were a member of the First Families of Virginia (F.F.V.), a pseudo-aristocratic family of American white society. The reason why the people in Dawson's Landing did not look down on Tom, or even scold or talk down to Tom, was his social capital in the form of aristocratic Driscoll family name. Tom symbolized Driscoll's eminent social status, their financial affluence; he is the personification of the Driscolls. This incongruence serves as reinforcement in of the real worth of Tom's social and cultural capital: Tom's worth radiates *only* from his social 'upbringing' and 'background' i.e. his access to a significant sum of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu has commented on how educational achievement on children is not based on 'natural' aptitudes, but, in fact, on cultural and social capital investment (Bourdieu, 2011: 82). Here, Bourdieu hinted that the attainment of cultural and social capital forms is not 'natural,' but they are gained through channels, such as through family name (2011: 86-7). Tom, by this same perspective, may not fit to be called an aristocrat, since he, as his nature, was too easygoing, lazy, careless, and weak (Clemens, 1980: 45). His acknowledged social position, however, enabled Tom to become a wealthy, privileged member of society who did not even expect the need to work for his living, "to hunt up an occupation" (Clemens, 1980: 23). Tom's considerable worth in the society had nothing to do with the real quality of his character. His ownership of significant cultural and social capital through the Driscoll's family name is what propped him into being considered as a worthwhile person. Therefore, Tom functions as a sum of all Driscoll's cultural, social, and economic capitals, as he was acknowledged as having the name of a powerful Driscoll family. However, it must always be kept in mind that Tom was a fraud; he was actually a black slave illegally possessing the white aristocratic capitals.

To understand more about power subversion in Tom as a black slave, it is worth discussing here how Tom could ever achieve such a lofty position. As discussed before, Roxy planted Tom in this position, but it was the society elite's weakness that allowed it to happen and even perpetuated it. To

be more specific, it was made possible by Percy Driscoll's neglect. Percy, Tom Driscoll's father, was so absorbed in his economic speculations, that he did not pay proper attention to his child (Clemens, 2011: 16). He has recklessly relegated Tom's upbringing, the very important task of raising of an heir, to Roxy the black slave. As a result of his oversight, Percy could not even differentiate his own son from Roxy's. In this sense, Percy has let loose Tom's identity, and Roxy took advantage of this chance and reappropriated Tom's identity, given it to his son. Percy's fault is what finally allowed Valet de Chambre to pass as Tom Driscoll, undetected. Here, Tom's aristocratic existence is the very symbol of the undermining of the power of the ruling master, Percy Driscoll. Tom stands as the living proof of deceiving the white master to recognize a 'negro' as his own heir of a white aristocratic family. Tom was planted as the future owner of all the cultural, social, economic capitals, and power, of the Driscoll family

With such a liberal 'attainment' of social, cultural, and economic capital, Tom was required to at least act like a white aristocrat. This is one requirement set for Tom by the Driscoll's patriarch, Judge Driscoll, if Tom wants to earn the Driscoll's inheritance (Clemens, 1980: 35). In the story, this means he must uphold the honor of the Driscolls, and act honorably, or, otherwise, Judge Driscoll will disinherit Tom (Clemens, 1980: 35). This threat is the final punishment: an act of expulsion from Driscoll's social, cultural, and economic capital. From Bourdieu's point of view, this process can be seen as the elite of the family's attempt at defining the family's aristocratic identity by setting boundaries, as it is exposed to "redefinition, alteration, adulteration" by wayward members such as Tom (Bourdieu, 1980: 87). Using Bourdieu's terms, the institutionalized delegation, in this case, Tom acting as a delegate representing the whole Driscoll family reputation, ensures the concentration of social capital in him. However, Tom's delegation also means that he has to limit "individual lapses" which is considered below Driscoll's aristocratic principles (Bourdieu, 2011: 87). Judge Driscoll here acts explicitly as the authoritative spokesman who tried to shield Driscoll's family overall 'capital' from discredit, by threatening expulsion of the embarrassing individuals, which is Tom.

Compounding on Judge Driscoll's demands for Tom's maintenance of high standard was the revelation of Tom's true nature at the time: a negro slave. Tom did not know that he was a slave, up until Roxy revealed to him that he was actually her slave son (Clemens, 1980: 41-2). This revelation truly changes Tom's perspective in viewing the cultural and social capitals he owned. Before his revelation, he expected himself to gain all the socio-cultural privileges that he believed himself entitled to. However, he was shown by Roxy that he was in no way entitled to any of the capitals he enjoyed, as he was actually a negro slave having no social status. Tom became truly aware that he was a thief, a black slave posing as a white aristocrat. He was well aware of this and did feel the fear of being detected (Clemens, 1980: 44-5).

It is from this moment that Tom's subversion of power is truly manifested. Tom acted as an active, even desperate, criminal, as he was a slave in disguise, exploiting his unidentified blackness to pose as a wealthy white aristocrat. He was well-aware of his negro status, yet he still poised to acquire Judge Driscoll's capitals through his will. Tom's revelation of his negro ancestry even brought newfound hatred of the white people's notion of inequality and slavery, especially toward his uncle Judge Driscoll (Clemens, 1980: 45). Tom also had no intention of revealing himself as the real Valet de Chambre. Roxy's words here summarizes Tom's goals, in her statement that she "was happy seeing his negro kid lording over the white people, vengeance for her race," (Clemens, 1980: 22). Tom wanted to rob Judge Driscoll's entire wealth and capital, by perpetuating the illusion of Tom's Driscoll inheritance and family name.

Tom then became more aggressive in his quest of pursuing the goal of maintaining his previous social position as the heir of the Driscoll dynasty. How he struggled to maintain such 'illegal' position, is by actively pursuing and maintaining social and cultural capitals that marked him as a white aristocrat. In the story, after Roxy's revelation, Tom "dropped gradually back into his old frivolous and easygoing ways and conditions of feeling and manner of speech, and no familiar of his could have detected anything in him that differentiated him from the weak and careless Tom of other days," (Clemens, 1980: 45). From this description, Tom focused his struggle by maintaining social signifiers of lifestyle, demeanor, and speech. To describe why Tom decided to maintain these aspects, Bourdieu *in his discussion of social capital* hinted at the 'full powers of acting and speaking' (*plena potestas agendi et loquendi*), as a way a delegated agent can represent the whole of a group. An agent of a powerful group is endowed with significant power of the group's collective social and cultural capital, as long as the

agent, in this case, Tom, can represent ways of 'acting and speaking' of the elite group, which is the Driscoll's aristocratic white family. The frivolous, easygoing lifestyle and demeanor are the privileges of the white people of sufficient means, as it is stated in the story that black slaves were expected to be meek, docile, and hardworking, and therefore a black slave cannot afford to be frivolous or easygoing (Clemens, 1980: 44). Because of this, the emulation of frivolous and easygoing manner by Tom was the correct way of representing the elite Driscoll's white status. The manner of speech is also a clear identifier between a black slave and a white person, as speech can imply white education. Roxy made this very statement when she and Chambers had trouble saying and understanding the word 'disinherit' (Clemens, 1980: 35) and she even explained how people can identify her slave status by her speech (Clemens, 1980: 80). Tom returning to his usual speech maintains his representation as a member of the white, affluent, Driscoll family. From these efforts of emulation, Tom maintained his 'link' to the Driscoll's collective social and cultural capital. He focused his struggle by maintaining social signifiers of lifestyle, demeanor, and speech, because these signifiers are cultural signifiers that signify elevated social status, and are parameters of social and cultural capitals.

Beside maintaining outward manners and speech, Tom was then required to defend his honor. Judge Driscoll ordered Tom to preserve the family's honor by facing Count Luigi in a duel. The duel was an important filial test to prove Tom's worthiness as a member of the aristocratic First Families of Virginia. Scott Moore claimed that this duel is very important in maintaining the noble blood, and preserving the purity, of the Driscoll's aristocratic family (Clemens, 1980: 5-6). Moore argued that the duel was also required by the society of Dawson's Landing, who acted as a 'jury' who will pass its judgment on Driscoll's family name (Clemens, 1980: 6). Such a good opinion of the society can mean significant social capital, since society's recognition is one of the crucial standards by which a person or a group social capital is judged (Bourdieu, 2011: 84).

This honor test is rendered more significant because this a test that Tom failed, and this reveals the working of the social and cultural capital transmitted by the Driscolls to the person of Tom. Tom's failure was rebuked by Judge Driscoll and other society members of the Dawson's Landing. In the story, the concept of the duel was taken too lightly by Tom, and he carelessly told Puddn'head Wilson and Roxy about that. Puddn'head Wilson rebuked Tom, saying that Tom, by virtue of his birth, should have challenged Luigi to a duel (Clemens, 2011: 69). Even the slave Roxy was terribly angry that Tom did not challenge Luigi to a duel, and stated Tom's cowardice was the result of the lowly "nigger soul in you," (Clemens, 1980:70). Perhaps the most damning rebuke was that, when Judge Driscoll knew that Tom cowardly refused to duel Luigi, he tore apart his will and disinherited Tom (Clemens, 1980: 2- 60). This act signifies how important the duel was in maintaining the access of Tom's social and cultural capital to that of the Driscolls. The cowardice act of avoiding the duel resulted in disinheritance, which severs the social and cultural capital bond of the Driscolls had with Tom.

The way to re-affirm such a severed bond was also done in the story through the cultural and social capital channel, which is the family blood. It was not, however, done by the efforts of Tom, rather, it was Judge Driscoll's own initiative. Judge Driscoll redrew the will and placed Tom again as the successor of the Driscoll family. The reason why the Judge did that was to honor Tom's father, Percy Driscoll, and he did that despite Tom's seemingly irreparable bad qualities (Clemens, 1980: 68). This is another confirmation that Tom's immoral and weak qualities did not deter him from gaining significant cultural and social capital, because these forms of capital are gained through their own channels, which is family ancestry, and not through morality.

As a conclusion, Tom Driscoll's white aristocratic identity was built and maintained through the exploitation of social and cultural capitals. Tom was able to perpetuate his ownership of the social and cultural capital through the exploitation of his dual slave/master identity as the basic inherited capital. He maintained and developed his outward cultural signifiers such as dress and speech to preserve his 'white' appearance, gaining him social and cultural capital as he passed himself as a white aristocrat. Furthermore, he conformed to the lofty ideals of lifestyle, manner, language, and honor, required by Judge Driscoll, for the sake of gaining the social and cultural capital, and the resulting economic capital of the Driscoll's family. These are all maintained by Tom in order to rob the Driscoll's of their capitals, and ultimately, their power. Perhaps the act of Judge Driscoll's killing by Tom aptly symbolizes the entire purpose of Tom Driscoll at the time: he is disguised himself, and killed the Driscolls' Patriarch, in an attempt to rob them of their worldly possessions, and to finally undermine and subvert the white masters' power, as his own.

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