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COSMOPOLITAN SKIN

TATTOOS AND TRAVEL IN THOMAS HARDY'S *A LAODICEAN*

Référence électronique

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ABSTRACT

The tattoo was a common “mark” of both travelling and openness to local experience or to simply going native. It was both indelible and peculiarly identifying, and yet one that could seem both alien and alienating. It was often considered barbaric, but was also a peculiarly modern sign of travel and sophistication. Here, I would like to place tattooing in the history of its imagined relationship to the domestic and the exotic, as well as the new and the old. First, I will offer a brief historical consideration of how perceptions of the practice developed in three phases over the century, and subsequently talk a bit about Thomas Hardy’s novel *A Laodicean* in which a tattoo figures prominently in his representation of links between cosmopolitanism and atavism, aristocratic decadence and Philistine propriety.

KEYWORDS

Identity, Tattoo, British Fiction, Thomas Hardy, Tichborne Claimant

“...when I go through the country, and see this and that beautiful and imposing seat of theirs crowning the landscape, ‘There,’ I say to myself, “is a great fortified post of the Barbarians.”

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 77

In 1869, Matthew Arnold, the English poet, critic and “sage”, divided the British into the Barbarians (aristocracy), Philistines (the rising middle class) and the populace. Though he found something to admire in all, he still found the majority in all three faulty and selfish: the Philistines narrow and money-mad, the populace still unformed, and the Barbarians anti-intellectual and disinclined to modernize. Arnold was writing after the tempestuous debates around the second Reform Bill. He sought to distinguish who was really fit to be a citizen of the nation in a meaningful way, as the Bill extended the franchise downward toward the lower reaches of the middle class and upper reaches of skilled labor. As Britain evolved toward a more equitable polis, it was keen to distinguish itself from other countries’ models, especially America (that land entirely of Philistines) and its ancient rival France — though Arnold suggests that the French understanding of a greater good than individualism is exactly what his country needs to develop. Amanda Anderson’s *The Powers of Distance* (2001) advances a foundational discussion of the anxiety that accompanied the Victorian view of cosmopolitanism in the mid-century: specifically, that being a citizen of the world could lead to having no clear allegiances, and worldly sophistication could breed moral sophistry. For the remainder of the century, the tension between modernity and tradition — and the longer durée of the modern and evolutionary history — would be fundamental to discussions not only of politics, but of aesthetics. Moreover, as empire expanded and as rising numbers of Philistines became as well-read and travelled as the very cosmopolitan Barbarians traditionally were, the tension between an idea of immutable Britishness and the value of tolerant internationalism became increasingly sharp.

The tattoo was a common “mark” of both travelling and openness to local experience — or to simply going native. It was both indelible and peculiarly identifying, and yet one that could seem both alien and alienating. It was often considered a barbaric practice by authors throughout the nineteenth century, but was also read a peculiarly modern sign of travel and even sophistication, seen not only on sailors but, by the end of the period, on middle-class travelers and even royalty and other elites. Here, I would like to place tattooing in the history of its imagined relationship to the domestic and the exotic, as well as the new and the old. First, I will offer a brief historical consideration of how perceptions of the practice developed in Britain, and specifically in three phases over the nineteenth century as context. I will then follow with a detailed discussion of Thomas Hardy’s novel *A Laodicean* (first published

in 1881), in which a tattoo figures prominently in his representation of links between cosmopolitanism and atavism, aristocratic decadence and Philistine propriety.

TATTOOING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

Tattooing and skin marking occupy a special place in the larger context of anxieties and delight in the exotic and cosmopolitan — itself mapped onto the savage and the modern in complex ways. Over the course of the nineteenth century, there were three principal phases of associations with tattooing in British literature. The first association is with Britons' exotic travel; the second is the establishment of identity, when that identity is in question. The third and final meaning is an ambiguous association with aristocratic privilege and cosmopolitanism that itself comes to evoke an atavistic, anti-modern untrustworthiness. Like a photograph, the tattoo could seem unalterable evidence of an actual individual's surface untainted by the mediating force of individual interpretation. Yet, it could also be tricky.

Tattooing has an ancient global history; it was long known in the Biblical world, is forbidden to Jews in *Leviticus* and seems to have been common in ancient Britain as well. However, it seems to have waned as a local practice in modern Western Europe until the modern period, when it reappeared as an exotic import. Joel Konrad details sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century English encounter literature's fascination with the manners of the new travelers they met, for example in Virginia, and especially with dress and bodily decoration: "Somatic alteration was often the initial and most striking contrast that English travelers recorded in their encounters with overseas peoples. ... Among these visible markers, ornamentation was perceived as perhaps the most useful outward expression of barbarity" (2011, 31). At the same time, Britons sought to understand these cultures in terms of hierarchies, and considered more elaborate ornaments as an indication of superior social and civilizational status. Konrad points out that British writers often appealed to Puritan standards of modesty to denounce the "flamboyance of Elizabethan dress" (2011, 40), particularly of elites, by comparing them to the body-markings of indigenous "barbarous gallants" in North America or the South Seas: "these critics used the unquestionable barbarity of the non-English marked body as a pedagogical tool in an attempt to impose restraint upon those whose dress did not conform to modest modes of bodily deportment," especially aristocrats and wealthy merchants (2011, 40). In 1774, Captain James Cook brought back a Tahitian named Omai, who displayed his tattoos at court, and was painted by Joshua Reynolds, among others (Guest,

200, 84), foregrounding tattooing again in the attention of the broader public. In the nineteenth century, Britons associated it with sailors visiting Asia and the Pacific, although it was also common in the Americas and in the early colonial period, often associated with that region (for examples, see Mallery 1894, Konrad 2011). The nineteenth century saw many sensational tales of abductions and forcible tattooing of white women by Native Americans, as with, for example, Olive Oatman (see Mifflin 2011). Tattooing was also widely used in the nineteenth century in India (by Indians and later, Britons, who used it to stigmatize and identify criminals), and slaves were tattooed and/or branded in many European colonies and in the US (C. Anderson, 2000, 107). Although by the mid-Victorian period, Britons denounced such practices as cruel in the colonies, they had in fact been fairly recently abolished in Britain. According to the University of Newcastle's Museum of Antiquities, punitive tattooing in England was known until at as late as 1871 (see Spicer, 2006, for images).



A selection of tattoos on a piece of human skin showing a nude female, a pot of flowers and a gentleman. The United Kingdom: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

TATTOOING AND FALSE IDENTITY

Voluntary tattooing was of course much more common in nineteenth-century Britain, as we can see in many documentary sources and also in Anatomical Museums' specimens. It was widely associated with that most British of professions, sailing. By the mid-century, the tattoo's traditional association with identification crosses over from criminology to the emerging field of forensic medicine. In mid-century Britain, a surge of interest in such marks was initiated by the Tichborne case. Briefly, an imposter by the name of Arthur Orton, from Wagga Wagga, Australia, came to London in 1866 claiming to be Sir Roger Tichborne, the long lost heir of a substantial fortune and family name. Roger, born in 1829, had been raised in France, and was lost at sea in 1854. Roger had been a thin man with light brown hair, whose first language was French. Arthur was a very heavy man with dark hair who did not speak French. But Roger's bereaved mother grasped at the hope that her child was alive, and accepted the imposture. Lady Tichborne died in 1868, and the surviving family began to be restive about the heir. A trial to establish his identity took place over several months in 1871 and 1872. One thing that finally undermined his claim was the fact that Tichborne been tattooed in several places (as well as scarred), and Orton had no such tattoos^[1].

Victorian forensic medical expert Alfred Swaine Taylor reports that Roger Tichborne had early on tattooed and been tattooed by the future Lord Bellew, "a schoolfellow of Roger's, [who] deposed that in 1847-8 he saw the cross, heart and anchor on Roger's arm, and that he himself tattooed the letters RCT in addition to those symbols" (Taylor, 1879, 297). Roger tattooed Lord Bellew's arm the same day (Taylor, 1879, 297). (Roger was born in 1829, so at 16 or so, he already was sporting substantial ink.) Orton, however, still had many, largely working-class, supporters who believed he had been done out of his rights. There was evidence given at trial by various experts on such markings, and whether they could disappear through disease (the consensus was that they would not). This trial did much to popularize forensic medicine and the consistent connection of tattoos to stories of *false* identity starting in the mid-century seems to emerge in Britain as a result of the Tichborne case. Alfred Swaine Taylor's *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence* went through thirteen editions in the nineteenth century, and is a good index of the development of professional interest in tattoos in the period. The first, 1836 edition had nothing on tattoos or scars (and also nothing on poisons, which comprise a substantial chunk of the eighth edition of 1844). In 1866, the 8th edition still mentions no tattoos. By the 10th edition of 1879, there is a detailed section on

1 The case has been extensively described and discussed, but the best, most recent account is Rohan McWilliam's *The Tichborne Claimant: a Victorian Sensation*.

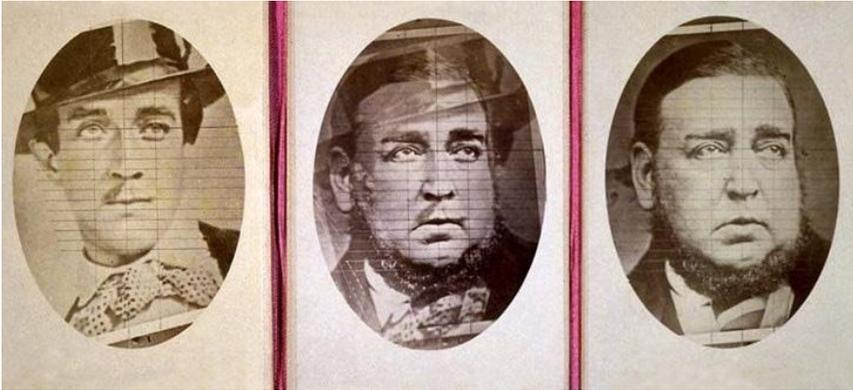
tattoos and scars, heavily referencing the Tichborne case. The story was also widely fictionalized, and tattoos moved to the fore as plot devices to establish identity.^[2]

This example highlights a confusing aspect of tattooing in the period. In the British imagination, the tattoo was still bound up representationally in visiting savage and exotic peoples, and of being away from England: it was a marker of experience, but also of being transformed by those experiences. Very often, this was in the context of empire and colonialism, in which the tattoo could claim a certain status of familiarity with a very different culture and place. In fiction, as in the Tichborne case, this could be narrated as the home community's inability to identify the traveller as the "same" person who had gone abroad. To a somewhat lesser extent, it was also associated with working class masculinity, with sailors and perhaps criminals. But Roger Tichborne's tattooing was done by and to English aristocrats, in that quintessentially English institution, the public school. Though Roger did indeed become a sailor, his tattoos' exoticism was, as was his sea career at sixteen, still only aspirational. Tattoos were both exotic and quintessentially British, make parallel-elite and working-class.

TATTOOS AS AN ELITE FASHION

By the end of the century, as historian Jordana Bailkin observes, detailed tattooing had become a tony fashion for upper class Britons. The stylized work of Japanese tattoo artists' was especially admired. But one didn't have to go all the way to Japan: "Tattoo artists of London were lionized [celebrated] in society journals and catered to wealthy clients in lavish Orientalist studios" (Bailkin, 2005, 34). Bailkin notes that by the early twentieth century, tattoos "could function in Britain as an emblem of cultural elitism rather than the radical 'outsider' status it conferred elsewhere in Europe" (2005, 34). She observes for example that the British tattooing 'craze' followed the precedent of the royal family: Edward VII acquired one in 1862 during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and his sons followed suit in Japan and then — literally in their father's footsteps-- in Jerusalem. (Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem have long marked their visit with a tattoo.)

2. It also often marks political criminality, as in Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860), where the mark is described as a brand. In Fergus Hume's *Tracked by a Tattoo* (1896), it is initially thought that such an affiliation explains a particular tattoo, but this is a red herring; it turns out that an aristocratic sailor, who learns tattooing as a boy (much like Roger Tichborne), tattoos his rightful heir as a baby, to prevent his discarded mistress from substituting his illegitimate son for the legitimate heir. For more examples, see Bailkin (2005, 55-56). See also my *Victorian Skin*, chapter 8 for an extended discussion of H. Rider Haggard's *Mr Meeson's Will* and Saki's "The Background."



Tichborne daguerrotype by Thomas Helsby. Author of Claimant photograph not identified (transferred by Jbarta/originally uploaded by Jbarta). - Scanned from here The image was published in the book *Identity Demonstrated Geometrically: With Photo-type Illustrations*, also known as *William Mathews* (1876) From *Chili to Piccadilly with Sir Roger Tichborne: The Santiago Daguerreotypes and the London Photographs Compared*, Bristol; London: J. Wright OCLC: 52243601. (Originally uploaded on en.wikipedia.)

Tattoos were thus often marks of some luxury, not least the luxury of travel. Tattooing memorialized important occasions, life events, or journeys. Victorian journalist R. J. Stephens remarks that, “Colonials visiting England usually return home bearing on some part of their body an emblem of some national importance, such as the Queen's portrait, or the Union Jack» (1898-99, 473-474). People had reproductions of favorite paintings; such as some by Landseer and Reynolds (Stephens, 1898-99, 474). Even when the luxury was not specifically related to travel, tattoos were status symbols. Bailkin notes that elite clients tended to inscribe their heritage and wealth upon their bodies, inscribing: “their own coats of arms..., or ... emblems of their exclusive clubs, ... reproductions of money-bills, or scenes of foxhunts in full cry” (2005, 43-44). The tattoo is by this point appropriated as a mark of English metropolitan identity, however exotically oriental the studio décor may have been.

Bailkin suggests that the metropolitan fashion for tattooing in the 1880s–1920s was related to “an era of exceptional strain for the aristocracy” and argues that the aristocracy was increasingly read in the period by criminologists — and perhaps perceived itself — as an atavistic, premodern class (Bailkin, 2005, 34) — echoes here perhaps of the Puritan disdain for aristocratic “barbarous gallants” discussed by Konrad (2011). But as we see in the epigraph to the chapter, the association reemerges earlier in the nineteenth century itself. In 1869, Matthew Arnold calls the aristocracy Barbarians, and considered that their concern for the exterior body and feats of physical prowess were values

identified with “savage” states of society supposed to be developmentally prior to modernity:

The care of the Barbarians for the body ... the vigour, good looks, and fine complexion which they acquired [...] may be observed still in our aristocratic class. [...] this culture (to call it by that name) of the Barbarians was an exterior culture mainly: it consisted principally in outward gifts and graces, in looks, manners, [...] prowess; the chief inward gifts [...] were [...] those which come nearest to outward ones: [...] courage, a high spirit, self-confidence. (1869, 76)

It was seven years later in *L'Uomo Delinquente* (1876) that the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso observed that the attraction to tattoos was evidence of savage and criminal tendencies (in part perhaps because the Neapolitan Camorra tended to be heavily tattooed). In later remarks on tattooing, he linked it to “atavism, or that other kind of historical atavism that is called tradition. Tattooing is, in fact, one of the essential characteristics of primitive man, and of men who live still in the savage state.” (Lombroso, 1896, 102-103). Lombroso first theorized criminality as related to atavism in 1876, “The criminal is an atavistic being, a relic of a vanished race. ... Atavism [is] the reversion to a former state”; this reversion could take place as a result of social stresses and disease, but he estimated about one-third of criminals were “born criminals.” (1911, 135). Lombroso sees tattoos as a form of savage self-expression similar to early idiographic forms of writing (1896, 97). Insensitivity to pain and precocity (or early maturity), for Lombroso, also marked the savage state (1896, 97), and atavism was understood as an evolutionary reversion to an earlier type. Such persons could be visually identified by traits such as large ears, long arms, a sloping forehead, and so on. Such throwbacks were also amoral, childlike, vainglorious, impulsive and cruel.

Havelock Ellis, the English physician and eugenicist famed for his foundational work on the study of sexuality takes up, and popularizes Lombroso's work in Britain. In 1890, Ellis published *The Criminal*, in which he acknowledges “cosmic” and “social” causes of crime, the first including hot weather, diet, etc., and the second, following Lacassagne, emphasizes poverty. But he is also interested in “the *biological* factor. Under this head we include the consideration of all the personal peculiarities of the individual, anatomical, physiological, psychological. These peculiarities may be atavistic, atypic, or morbid” (1890, 24). Elsewhere in the same work, Ellis not only gives credence to many of Lombroso's markers of biological atavism as predisposing to criminality—the prognathous jaw, the attached earlobe— but also to a psychological atavism or reversion: “To admit... in the criminal, a certain psychical and even physical element belonging to a more primitive age

is simple and perfectly reasonable. It has been observed over and over again, independently and apart from any special theory of criminality” (1890, 208). He at one point calls this “simulated atavism,” which results,

When an original vice of organic constitution has thrown an individual into a more primitive ... strata of society, the influence of environment will itself simulate the effects of atavism ... If the organic impulses of a man's constitution have led him to throw in his lot with brigands, he will not fail to live as a brigand lives — that is, as a barbarian lives. This is not atavism, though it may be the outcome of atavism, or arrest of development (1890, 210-211)

He cites a wide variety of sources to suggest that such a person might be “normal” or even admirable in what he imagines as a prior developmental state of society — one that privileged violence and impulsivity. He concludes,

Criminality [...] consists in a failure to live up to the standard recognised as binding by the community. The criminal is an individual whose organisation makes it difficult or impossible for him to live in accordance with this standard [...] By some accident of development, by some defect of heredity or birth or training, he belongs as it were to a lower and older social state than that in which he is actually living. It thus happens that our own criminals frequently resemble in physical and psychical characters the normal individuals of a lower race. This is that ‘atavism’ which has been so frequently observed in criminals and so much discussed. It is the necessarily anti-social instinct of this lowlier organised individual which constitutes the crime. (1890, 206-207)

Ellis also offers a detailed discussion of tattoos. Here, he departs from Lombroso's emphasis on criminal tattoos per se, remarking that there are many causes for tattoos, including religion, vanity, idleness and “higher emotions” such as the memory of loved ones (1890,107): “It is better to describe it as a survival. ... The ... material expression of metaphor and emblematic language were first adopted by the most elevated classes ... Little by little this method took refuge with those lower classes who have as yet no better means of expressing what they feel and experience” (1890, 196)

Still, Ellis continues to associate tattoos at this time with a developmentally prior state of society.

READING IDENTITY AND CHOOSING MODERNITY IN HARDY'S *A LAODICEAN*

A Laodicean (1881), subtitled “A Story of Today,” focuses on the contrast between the ancient and modern. The novel’s title refers to the archaic adjective “Laodicean,” derived from the *Book of Revelation* (KJB, 3,14-22), which means indecisive or half-hearted: “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write... thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” The female protagonist, Paula, is the nominal Laodicean, romantically attracted to the medieval past and the aristocracy, and yet an up-to-date New Woman who practices gymnastics and likes modern technology. In *A Laodicean*, Hardy’s well-known interest in theories of degeneration, evolution and heredity is central to his portrayal of the survival of, or reversion to type.³ However, he is not a scientist and his uses of these ideas does not make a precise distinction between atavism, simulated atavism, and the concept of the “survival” of prior traits. (I shall use the term “atavism” as a shorthand for his many uses of these ideas.) Notably, in this novel, he explores atavism within the context of a degenerate aristocracy, through a particular character of aristocratic blood who displays traits associated with an aristocratic past, but a primitive or criminal present.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Bailkin observes, tattoo stories tended to emphasize the decay of the British aristocracy and especially “themes of illegitimacy and catastrophic loss’ (2005, 47). Although she is largely concerned with novels in the late 1890s or later, her remarks are illuminating in reference to Hardy’s novel. *A Laodicean* is a tale of young English lovers caught between old and new ways, between aristocracy and the “march of mind” represented by the new professional classes. The novel prominently features a tattoo. Typically of Hardy’s symbols, it functions to invoke a series of oppositions — it is a sign of true identity (both of birth and social aspiration) and of fraud, of atavism and modernity, of the desire for rootedness and of a cosmopolitan disregard of norms. The plot is briefly as follows. De Stancy Castle has recently passed out of the hands of its impoverished old Norman family and into the ownership of Paula Powers, the heiress of an engineering family. Caught between vague longings for aristocratic legitimacy and her own “Puritan” roots, between feudal notions and “modern” ones (Hardy’s terms), Paula is the eponymous Laodicean. She hires a young architect, Somerset, to restore the castle to its medieval glory. He falls in love with her, and she seems inclined to reciprocate. But meanwhile, the scion of the De Stancy name,

3. See Briggs (2013), Krasner (1992), Keen (2014), or Abberley (2020) for discussions of Hardy’s use of evolutionary and physiological science.

a soldier, arrives. A mysterious young photographer, Dare, also appears and uses fraud both to lead De Stancy to court Paula and, unknown to De Stancy, to blacken the reputation of Somerset, De Stancy's rival for Paula's affections.

Dare is one of Hardy's quasi-mythical figures, described at one point as Dionysian. His age and sex are uncertain: "His age it was impossible to say. ... In repose he appeared a boy; but his actions were so completely those of a man that the beholder's first estimate of sixteen ... was hastily corrected to six-and-twenty, and afterwards shifted ... along intervening years ... his hair, ... was parted in the middle, ... in the fashion sometimes affected by the other sex" (1881, 45). Somerset finds himself unable even to sketch Dare's features, and Dare is defined by his indeterminacy. When queried about his nationality, he never makes a positive response: "I have lived mostly in India, Malta, Gibraltar, the Ionian Islands, and Canada" (1881, 124). On another occasion, he is asked, "I never can quite make out what you are, or what your age is. ... And are you an Englishman, Frenchman, Indian, American, or what?" He responds, "I am a citizen of the world. I owe no country patriotism, and no king or queen obedience. A man whose country has no boundary is your only true gentleman" (1881, 124). He is referred to repeatedly as a "cosmopolite" (1881, 63), and, more ambiguously, a "traveller" (1881, 328) — a term often seeming in this text to suggest criminal or political irregularities. (The other character described in this novel as a traveller is wanted for terrorism.) Dare claims a superlative and positive identity as a "citizen of the world," but offers in fact a good illustration of that aspect of cosmopolitanism that Amanda Anderson discusses: the Victorian anxiety that a citizen of the world might lack any specific loyalty or moral responsibility.

But Dare has one strongly-felt claim to an identity, a romantic but doubly illicit one to a bygone aristocratic past. On one of the occasions when Dare is pressed to name a birthplace, he dodges: "It would be a fact worth the telling. The secret of my birth lies here.' And Dare slapped his breast with his right hand. ... 'It is necessary that it should be recorded ... should verification be required at a time of delirium, disease, or death'" (1881, 124). We are not then told what is beneath his shirt. Later, as Dare urges De Stancy to marry Paula to regain the castle, we discover that he is De Stancy's illegitimate son. He hopes for his father to regain the family seat. But De Stancy does not care for the castle, and he speaks of his vow to remain true to Dare's dead mother, in reparation for not marrying her. In response, Dare "threw open his shirt-front, and revealed tattooed on his breast the letters De Stancy" (1881, 143).

In short, Dare claims his body is Castle De Stancy (as was, by the way, the alternate title of Hardy's novel). But of course, Dare was not born at the castle, which no longer belongs to his father's family — and he is not a legitimate



Du Maurier G., (1880), *Is The Resemblance Strong?* Wood-engraving. Sixth illustration for Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean. A Story of Today*, Part Four in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Book III, Chapter 2.

Scanned image and text by Philip V. Allingham. <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/laodicean/6.html>

heir in any case. Still, just as he has this aspirational provenance marked on his own body, he has marked — or tattooed— it on the castle: “Somerset noticed that on the stonework ... sundry names and initials had been cut by explorers in years gone by. Among these antique inscriptions he observed two bright and clean ones, consisting of the words ‘De Stancy’ and ‘W. Dare,’ crossing each other at right angles” (1881, 65). This incident neatly hints at Dare’s (then unknown even to the reader) “crosswise” relation to the De Stancy bloodline, but also foreshadows, with some irony, what will happen — though he wishes to restore the De Stancy name to glory and its ancestral home, he will end up “crossing” these purposes.

The effort to signify identity by surface features is one Hardy repeatedly plays with, multiplying likenesses both true and counterfeit throughout the novel. Several critics have dealt extensively with visuality in the novel, most notably in relation to realism. Painting and photography were originally considered to be opposed in the mid-nineteenth century, with photography appearing to be more transparently “real” than painting (and critics attacked it as inartistic for that reason). However, as Jennifer Green-Lewis (1997) and Daniel Novak (2010) have each pointed out, by the latter decades of the century, photographers regularly manipulated photographs, and often did so in the service of a kind of realism, claiming that, as with painting, it was these departures from naïve duplication of the object that constitute a higher truth, representative of realism. In the 1880s, photography’s claims to accuracy of portrayal formed a partial basis for French penologist Alphonse Bertillon’s system of criminal identification, along with detailed measurements of features. Britain considered adopting the system, but ultimately used fingerprints instead, a process that had begun in the colonies. Police and colonial officials were particularly bad at identifying differences between the features of racial others, and fingerprinting provided a way to bypass that problem.^[4]

Even before photography was widely used for criminological purposes (which began in the mid-century), however, it functioned, as Alan Sekula points out, as a “double system: ... On the one hand, the photographic portrait extends, accelerates, popularizes, and degrades a traditional function. This function, which can be said to have taken its early modern form in the seventeenth century, is that of providing for the ceremonial presentation of the bourgeois self. Photography subverted the privileges inherent in portraiture. At the same time, photographic portraiture began to perform a role no painted portrait could have performed This role derived, not from any honorific portrait

4. We are seeing this problem reemerge with facial recognition software, which in the United States is particularly bad at correctly identifying people of African heritage. See Hill 2020, and Simonite 2019.

tradition, but from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustration. Thus photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other” (Sekula, 1986). Upon viewing the gallery of De Stancy portraits, Somerset immediately calls into question their use as an index of resemblance: “He wondered how many of the lofty foreheads and smiling lips of this pictorial pedigree could be credited as true reflections of their prototypes. Some were wilfully false, no doubt; many more so by unavoidable accident and want of skill. Somerset felt that it required a profounder mind than his to disinter from the lumber of conventionality the lineaments that really sat in the painter’s presence” (1881, 21). We are told that the portraits do tell one clear story of lineage: “Of the De Stancys pure there ran through the collection a mark by which they might surely have been recognized as members of one family; this feature being the upper part of the nose. Every one... had the special indent at this point in the face” (1881, 21). When he meets the last daughter of the family, he immediately recognizes her by it, though it seems to have decayed, much like the portraits and the family themselves: “He saw the dinted nose of the De Stancys outlined ... it was, so to speak, a defective reprint of that face: for the nose tried hard to turn up and deal utter confusion to the family shape” (1881, 23). The mark of sure recognition also represents utter confusion. Which is true? It suggests that one must be primed to recognize, to read the particular “dint” that is so distinctive, yet so defective, as meaningful.

These portraits continue to play a part throughout the novel in the recognition of family continuity. The impoverished Captain De Stancy deliberately plays up his family resemblance for Paula:

[His] ancestor had a mole on his cheek, black and distinct as a fly in cream; [...] It so happened that the captain had a mole, though not exactly on the same spot [...] In a short time he had drawn near to the painting of the ancestor whom he so greatly resembled. ... His modern and comparatively sallow complexion, as seen through the open visor, lent an ethereal ideality to his appearance which the time-stained countenance of the original warrior totally lacked.” (1881, 166-69)

Although he works hard to imitate the portrait, and even to remain “enclosed by the frame while covering the figure,” it is the portrait itself which is found wanting in verisimilitude; his “modern complexion” is what is wanted to perfect the image—at least for Paula’s subjective gaze. The mole is not in the same place, yet for Paula, primed to see that resemblance, it is enough. Still, although the family is supposedly easily identified by the marks handed down, Dare is never “mistaken” for a De Stancy. Although at one point, Paula and Havill agree that Dare “is something like” Charlotte, Paula then considers that, “He is really more like one or other of the old pictures about the house. I forget which” (1881, 30).

This question of the individual's inalienable identity versus resemblances by "type" is a persistent one in the novel, as is the question of the ability of the individual to either embody or override hereditary identity, as we see above with Dare's attempt to claim one. The novel begins with controversy over middle-class Paula's last-minute refusal of adult baptism into her hereditary (dissenting) faith, and the lovers first encounter each other through this event. This tension between what one is by inheritance — aristocratic lineage, family religion — and what one chooses to become, as well as to what extent choice is truly possible, is a central concern of the narrative. Another is how inscription and mediation can be read and interpreted; surface is both telling and deceptive, and must be contextualized both within the conventions of narrative and an understanding of histories and contexts for the telling of the tale.

Somerset, architect and connoisseur of patterns, remarks that Dare's resemblance to the De Stancys is accidental and goes according to type, rather than an individual characteristic: "People's features fall naturally into groups and classes, ... To an observant person they often repeat themselves; though to a careless eye they seem infinite in their differences" (1881, 63). But in this case, the observant son of a painter may be wrong about the origin of the similarity. Dare's own expertise is in photography, and he is hired by Paula to photograph the family portraits. Although photography was used even in the mid-century in collage and other altered forms for artistic uses, it was still often understood by the general public as an objective, instrumental form of art, free from the conventions that cause Somerset to doubt the truth of the portraits.⁵ Sun-pictures, it was often said, could not lie.

Of course, they could and did, and many of Hardy's readers knew it, even if they tended to think of that as an exception rather than the rule. Hardy's narrator emphasizes that Paula and Charlotte De Stancy, however, did *not* know it: "To them that picture ... had all the cogency of direct vision. ... they would as soon have thought that the sun could again stand still upon Gibeon, as that it could be made to falsify men's characters in delineating their features" (1881, 283). Dare specializes in exactly this form of fraud, making photographs "to represent people as they had never been" (1881, 336) --in the case of his campaign against Paula's suitor, showing Somerset as publicly drunk.

5. See Green-Lewis (1997) for a corrective to the belief that educated Victorian viewers were naïve consumers of photography as unmediated reality, and a brief discussion of the novel (84-85). However, even today when most people have at home easy access to photographic enhancement through Photoshop and similar programs, many are still surprisingly susceptible to the truth claims of photography.

See Claudia Nelson for a full discussion of childishness as a sign of atavism in the work of Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso.

In the 1870s and 80s, Francis Galton, statistician, eugenicist, and psychologist, was particularly interested in anthropometry and perception. He began to attempt to create images of average faces by type, through what he called “composite portraiture,” which involved superimposing several photographic images upon each other. The work began with the quest for “race types” (Jacobs 1885, Novak 2004), though he also hoped the technique would be useful for other types—for criminological purposes, for example. Galton wrote that he was able thus to “obtain with mechanical precision a generalised picture: one that represents no man in particular, but portrays an imaginary figure possessing the average features of any given group of men” (“Composite Portraits,” 1878, 133). Finally, he is also interested in tracing heredity traits within kinship groups (1878, 141). But perhaps most interestingly for our purposes here, Galton surprisingly concludes that the composite portrait is a superior likeness to the regular photograph. He argues that the best works of artists capture the reality of a face, whereas the photograph elevates a single expression. This combines with the natural inexactitude of human perception to skew recognition: “The analytical tendency of the mind is so strong that out of any tangle of superimposed outlines it persists in dwelling preferably on some one of them, singling it out and taking little heed of the rest. ... We often catch some strange combination which we are unable to recall on a subsequent occasion, while later still it may suddenly flash full upon us. A composite portrait would have much of this varied suggestiveness” (1878, 140-141.) Hardy is very likely to have read Galton, and the discussion surrounding this images, which was widely discussed in major publications in the period. The susceptibility of observers such as Paula to attribute meaning to aleatory details, such as the similarity of the Captain’s mole to his ancestor’s, especially when they are similarly dressed, is an example of this typically human false perception. The dint in the family nose, which appears only in degenerate form in the present generation, is a more truly shared, composite (and therefore meaningful) element that indexes both continuity and change in the family “type.”

A Laodicean, once dismissed as minor, has enjoyed a renaissance of critical interest in recent years, in part because of the way it foregrounds issues of technology and perception. Most recent critics focus on Hardy’s interest in science and perceptual unreliability, especially of vision. James Krasner notes that Hardy often connects learning to the physiological psychology of seeing. Krasner argues that Hardy believes that the mind uses the intuition of pre-existing forms (i.e., associationism) in order to perceive an object (22), rather than just relying on sensory perception alone. The novel teaches readers that the tendency to trust our perception as an index of outer reality is dangerous. Will Abberly reads the novel in terms of Hardy’s interest in mimicry and adaptive appearance as an evolutionary device. Hardy, he

argues, emphasized the unreliability of perception “and promoted the virtue of interpretive restraint” (2020), through plots involving the misidentification of bodies, especially regarding heredity and kinship. Those pre-existing forms or conventions that Somerset sees as obscuring the truth of the portraits also shape the perception of photographs, even before they are altered. Dare’s is the only body in the novel which escapes such easy describability; it is uncanny and unknowable, and its only specificity is the tattoo, by which he could be identified, as he says, “should verification be required.”

This question of the reliability of “direct” vision and its representation strikes at the heart of debates about the legible body, just as the question of replicas and the continuity of family types and marks is centrality to discussions of degeneracy and eugenics. Tattoos used to claim identity, especially aristocratic identity, are meant to be read as true indices of kinship and value. But if breeding was everything, what of degeneration within noble families? If every replica was a less faithful copy of an original print, that was bad enough, but what if the degenerate replica was then further altered and degraded? What if the renovation of the faithful copy — the original self — depended on outside factors to preserve its integrity? Without Castle De Stancy, the De Stancys seem to have become flawed replicas; ineffectual, like the Captain and his sister; or worse, mutations that perpetuate further copy errors like the actively malign Dare. Hardy gestures toward degeneration theory here, but also toward a general association of aristocracy with savagery or atavism. It is less clear, however, what modernity offers to counter the romantic appeal of that past.

ARISTOCRATIC THROWBACKS AND THE DUBIOUS TRIUMPH OF MODERNITY

Dare’s childishness, which is also mistaken for more advanced age, is, like his tattoo, a sign of atavism as he is both a representative of an old civilization and of a savage state.^[6] But the tattoo also signifies his cosmopolitanism, as a souvenir of his up-to-date wanderings abroad. Like the uncertain modernization of the castle, to which Paula considers adding a Greek peristyle, (although she hires Somerset to restore the castle as a medieval expert), Dare has acquired the marks of wider culture. However, the tattoo cannot establish his identity or provenance, as he does not in fact come from anywhere, nor

6. Havelock Ellis writes, “In the criminal, we may often take it, there is an arrest of development. The criminal is an individual who, to some extent, remains a child his life long — a child of larger growth and with greater capacity for evil” (1890, 214). See Claudia Nelson for a full discussion of childishness as a sign of atavism in the work of Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso.

can it serve as a marker of experience, as the mark does not memorialize travel experiences. When Somerset remarks “that he is a being of no age, no nationality, and no behaviour,” (1881, 63), a rival architect responds that Dare is “A complete negative,” and then puns, “That is, he would be, if he were not a maker of negatives” (1881, 63). His tattoo attempts a positive assertion, but can only function to show its opposite: his illegitimacy. This negative De Stancy is both identical and a dark shadow and opposite; he is also a source of new, corrupt images. Like the photos he takes of the De Stancy family portraits now owned by Paula, he is a copy of a copy of something already alienated. And like his own “patent photographic process” (1881, 171), his copies are unfaithful reproductions, as illegitimate as his textual claim to De Stancy identity.

The very notion of lineage demands truth in reproduction, a value lost to moderns and those of no ancient blood. Hardy slyly suggests that modernity perhaps demands less allegiance to authenticity and more pragmatic embrace of deviant citations. Perhaps if Dare were less invested in a retrograde view of aristocratic lineage, he would be better prepared to claim a clear place in the world. When Paula finally marries Somerset, a local worker wonders what she will do with the paintings of an unrelated family and suggests a solution, “Well--why can't 'em hire a travelling chap to touch up the picters into her own gaffers and gammers? Then they'd be worth sommat to her” (1881, 370). The De Stancy family portraits could, in fact, be “touched up” rather easily — the proposition only seems naïve because their exchange value is historical and would be destroyed if this were done. The reader also knows that portraits are not worth money for their true likeness but for what Somerset calls a “lumber of conventionality” which prove their historical provenance. But the apparently absurd suggestion might be read as analogous to Paula's desire to reclaim the castle's medieval purity while marking it with her own “Greek” preferences. She herself hopes to give the pictures to the family, who do not want them. It is Dare who solves the problem: he creates negatives of them, then burns the originals. In Hardy's novel, surfaces require both careful reading and rewriting to be functional, but can never be considered as direct indices of material reality or an original referent. All iterations are “defective copies.” All texts are susceptible of multiple readings — and all identities are texts.

If the bioevolutionary discourse of barbarism and atavism that permeated writing about reforms for the working classes and studies in criminology in the Victorian era tended to focus on Society's lower strata, literature was as likely to be concerned with the upper levels. The traits of noble barbarity identified by Arnold come perilously close to what later writers would see as throwbacks to an earlier and more savage state. Lombroso understood

atavism as something expressed both morally in behaviour and physically in the phenotype; he believed that it was an evolutionary reversion to an earlier state. Such persons could be visually identified by traits such as large ears, long arms, a sloping forehead, prognathic jaw and so on (Lombroso, [1876] 1911, 10-15 and *passim*).

Such “throwbacks” were also amoral, vainglorious, impulsive and cruel ([1876] 1911, 35-40). I would suggest that the “magnetic” charm that Tamara Wagner identifies mid-Victorians having for the recent past of the Regency is by the period’s end associated with a general nostalgia for the beauty and charm identified with the aristocratic order.

But there is an ambivalence in that identification, with an aristocracy thought charming but amoral, beautiful but empty of the kind of refined modern subjectivity cultivated by the middle-class novel reader whose constant practice of introspection would lead to the “examined life.” They seem potentially cruel, as the child or savage is thought to be, untrammelled by modern consciousness or conscientiousness. The novel flirts with the nostalgic glamour of this atavistic character even if it must eventually turn against it, as Paula’s “Puritanism” demands that she reject the De Stancys once she knows of their forgeries. Early in the narrative when Somerset first sees the Castle, with a telegraph wire trailing up through an arrow-slit, he marvels that, “the hoary memorial of a stolid antagonism to the interchange of ideas, the monument of hard distinctions in blood and race, of deadly mistrust of one’s neighbour in spite of the Church’s teaching, and of a sublime unconsciousness of any other force than a brute one, should be the goal of a machine which beyond everything may be said to symbolise cosmopolitan views and the intellectual and moral kinship of all mankind” (1881, 18). Still, he reflects that the “modern mental fever and fret which consumes people before they can grow old was also signified by the wire; and this aspect of to-day did not contrast well (at least in his moonlight meditations) with the fairer side of feudalism” (1881, 18). The joys of hunting, “leisure, light-hearted generosity” and “healthy complexions” are associated with “such a living power in architectural art as the world may never again see - civilisation having at present a stronger attachment to lath and plaster than to walls of a thickness sufficient for the perpetuation of grand ideas.” (1881, 18) Hardy summarizes a transition from the easy identification of superiority with “healthy complexions” and “hard distinctions in blood and race” to a complex world evolving toward a deep “moral and intellectual kinship.” The Philistine Paula’s confused yearning for “Greek” simplicity — sweetness and light-- conjures instead the Etruscan barbarism of the illegitimate aristocrat Dare, and the couple, once freed of that incubus, wisely choose to let sleeping gods lie, and instead build their modern house of lath and plaster. And the

castle must pass to a new owner, who cannot claim that aristocratic identity, either by birth or marriage.

Dare's tattoo gestures toward his atavistic indeterminacy. His childishness, which is also mistaken for more advanced age, is a conventional sign of atavism, as he represents both an old bloodline and a savage state. But, the tattoo also signifies his cosmopolitanism, as a souvenir of his up-to-date wanderings abroad. Like the uncertain modernization of the castle, to which Paula considers adding a classical Greek peristyle, although she hires Somerset to conserve its original medieval architecture, Dare has acquired the marks of cultural exposure abroad. However, in his case the tattoo cannot establish his identity or provenance, as he does not in fact come from anywhere, nor can it serve simply as a marker of experience, as the mark does not memorialize actual experiences but rather a fantasy of origin. Like the photos he takes of the De Stancy family portraits now owned by Paula, he is a copy of a copy of something already alienated. And like his own 'patented photographic process,' his copies are unfaithful reproductions, as illegitimate as his textual claim to De Stancy identity.

Like Ellis, Hardy suggests that its origin of Dare's atavistic traits may be psychological and social, as well as biological. Dare's dishonorable conduct is referred back *both* to his illegitimacy and his aristocratic heritage. When De Stancy accuses Dare of ruining his prospects with Paula through criminal behavior, Dare retorts, 'As for my conduct, cat will after kind' (1881, 372). But although Dare is given almost no backstory by Hardy, the one hint we have is De Stancy's statement, 'while you thought you were the child of poverty on both sides, you were well enough; but ever since you thought you were more than that, you have led a life which is intolerable' (1881, 285). The influence of a romantic identification with the medieval castle corrupts Dare's character, just as it threatens to undermine Paula's commitment to both Somerset and modernity. Finally, when his scheme to recover the castle through a marriage between his father and Paula fails, Dare figures his aristocratic identity as being both the product of a bygone time, and as an animal being skinned, a subhuman predator and pest.

'We De Stancys are a worn-out old party--that's the long and the short of it. We represent conditions of life that have had their day--especially me. Our one remaining chance was an alliance with new aristocrats; and we have failed. We are past and done for. Our line has had five hundred years of glory, and we ought to be content. Enfin les renards se trouvent chez le pelletier.' [At last the foxes are at the furrier's.] (1881, 372)

As he departs, Dare sets the castle, with all its De Stancy furnishings and portraits, aflame, destroying the site he cannot claim.

As the portraits are set on fire, they appear to come to life, “he in the armour, who was so much like Captain De Stancy, [seems] to shake the plates of his mail with suppressed laughter; the lady with the three-stringed pearl necklace, ... to nod with satisfaction ... that this was a meet and glorious end” (1881, 374). Like all of these tricks of vision, Dare is not what he appears in the inscription on his surface-- but like any good fiction, it reveals a deeper truth: Dare is no English gentleman, but an unscrupulous cosmopolitan adventurer, and thus paradoxically, the perfect heir of an aristocracy that was seen in the period as more cosmopolitan than national and atavistically living a life devoted to a “skin-deep” display. The tattoo invokes all of these meanings, but fails finally to index any one as triumphant. Hardy uses the tattoo in ways suggested by all the three different periods of the century. Its implication of a knockabout, not too scrupulous traveller’s life are associated with the earliest meanings of the century, as is Dare’s polyglot exoticism. (The text also gestures to the multinational history of European aristocracy, and the DeStancy’s Norman heritage, as the castle passes into more solely English hands.) Dare deliberately attempts to exercise its mid-century associations (with establishing identity, claiming the role of heir). Finally, Hardy entails some of the meanings late century criminologists discuss — the tattoo as atavistic display and the connection of that display to the aristocracy as a holdover from the past. Identity, it seems, is always aspirational, and subject to the interpretations of others besides ourselves.

Modernity’s infatuation with what it considered the ancient and primitive remains a key theme through the late nineteenth century and of course on into the Gauguins and D. H. Lawrences of modernism. Paula and her lover decide on a fresh start, planning to let the gutted castle gather moss as a picturesque ruin and build an “eclectic” modern house nearby instead. “You, Paula, will be yourself again, and recover, ... from the warp given to your mind ... by the mediaevalism of that place” says Somerset (1881, 379). The novel concludes, however, with Paula’s rueful response “representing neither the senses and understanding, nor the heart and imagination; but what a finished writer calls “the imaginative reason”? ... Very well, I’ll keep straight on; and we’ll build a new house beside the ruin, and show the modern spirit for evermore. . . . But, George, ... ‘I wish my castle wasn’t burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!’” (1881, 379)

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