

**The Woman in the Race:
Racing and Re-racing Thomas Hardy's "Pure Woman" in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles***

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<1>After Alec's murder and before Tess and Angel rendezvous with the law at Stonehenge, they spend several nights in an uninhabited manor house. There the headboard of their bed is etched with some "carved running figures," which Angel identifies as "Atalanta's race" (376).(1) If he is correct about these "running figures," he and Tess pass their only nights of conjugal harmony beneath a rather peculiar sign: a frieze depicting an episode in the story of a mythical female hunter and warrior who eschewed marriage, but when pressured by her father, agrees to let a brutal foot-race decide the matter. Racing in full battle-dress against all comers who do not, themselves, have to compete under such a handicap, Atalanta will marry the winner but will kill any who fail to outrun her. Until Hippomenes, all her prior suitors had perished. He wins the race not by besting her on the terms she had set, however, but through diversion, by tossing out the golden apples Aphrodite had provided.

<2>On a purely formal level, this mythological image of competition and aggression diverted by the symbols of eros provides a unifying and oftentimes ironic narrative device within the novel. As yet another allusion to a mythical Grecian woman, it recalls the couple's halcyon days at Talbothays, when Angel compared Tess to Artemis and Demeter, idealizations that must echo, now, like recriminations in his ear. The allusion also deepens the irony of the narrator's invocation of the lines from Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* after Tess's wedding night confession, the means by which he expresses her recognition of Angel's newly de-idealized perception of his wife.(2) Coming at the hand of the woman Alec so doggedly pursued, his death is also symmetrical with that of Atalanta's failed suitors. Finally, the essence of the frieze as arrested motion, with its fixed "running figures," also mirrors the fugitives' temporary repose at Bramshurst Court and foreshadows their futile plan to "make for some port" and leave the country (374).

<3>However, in the novel's sociohistorical register, this frieze can also be read as the final figure for an unexamined discourse that bears heavily on Tess's tragedy; that is, "race," here, clearly denotes a competition. Hardy's other four invocations of the term differ, however, denoting the now much interrogated category signifying individual and social identity. And like his sedimented landscape renderings, Hardy's uses of the term similarly evoke its historically varying significations. Attending to this shifting discourse of race, then, offers a way to understand how Tess's tragedy is overdetermined, not only by the discourses of class and gender,

as the novel has routinely been read, but by intersecting discourses of race, as well. More specifically, Hardy's five invocations of the term anchor a lengthy sociohistorical narrative that correlates changing discourses of race with changing constructions of marital ideologies and changing perspectives on the virtuous female and her body. Tess attempts to negotiate these competing systems and founders.

<4>The intersection between modern discourses of race and those prescribing appropriate female gender roles has long been recognized, especially in studies that take European, colonial encounters with non-European others as their focus.⁽³⁾ However, as Tessie Liu reminds us, even before the "Age of Exploration," European culture was "already racially stratified . . . by lineage and bloodlines but not by skin color" (265). This is the signifying register of "race" with which the novel opens — when John Durbeyfield discovers his connection to "a noble race" (34). Aside from emphasizing lineage, that initial invocation, connoting a pre-modern understanding of the term signifying a group linked by common ancestry, contains no implication of the biologized identities that mark the term's later, modern constructions. Durbeyfield's discovery not only invokes that premodern, genealogical meaning, however, but it also sets the stage for Tess to reprise the aristocratic daughter's role as the lynchpin for preserving racial and caste purity through her strategically-deployed body. This "racial," historically aristocratic practice, however, collides with the forces of modernity, where changes in racial ideologies are synonymous with the demise of aristocratic hegemony, the ascent of middle-class liberalism and its new female ideal. The latter supplies Angel with the standards by which he condemns and abandons Tess.

<5>Hardy's later uses of the term consequently "race" Tess very differently — not as an aristocrat but as a "primitive" — clearly reflecting the influence of biological and anthropological pronouncements. Since the late eighteenth century, these discourses had redeployed those premodern, genealogical meanings within fewer but broader taxonomies and had hierarchized those newly racialized groups along a developmental axis connoting degrees of "civilization." By the time of *Tess's* serialization in 1891, these pseudo-sciences had not only affixed the Anglo-Saxon male firmly at the apex of this developmental axis but were "discovering profound similarities between gender and race": anthropologists and sociologists routinely identified "features within the body and mind of the [white] woman," particularly those of the lower social strata, that also inhered "in poor and dark-skinned people" (Levy 12). Through discursively manufacturing its colonial or imperial "other," anthropology not only primitively "othered" women but also reframed British history: it naturalized as racially "primitive" those prior aristocratic forms of alliance that Tess's Trantridge errand dramatizes.⁽⁴⁾

<6>While Hardy's direct invocations of "race" provide, as it were, landmarks in this signifying shift, two closely related strands of the narrative more fully map the migration in political authority, from an aristocratic regime that once spoke overtly through blood and of race understood as genealogy, to a liberal dispensation emphasizing gender — distinctions that will themselves be "raced": in *Tess's* at times sensational discourse of blood the deaths of Prince and Alec emphasize and ironically deploy the bodily property which underpinned aristocratic claims to political legitimacy; Hardy's sustained dialogue with the early English novel tradition, its domestic and sentimental discourses, which also intersect in Prince's and Alec's death, similarly

outlines a transposition of virtue, from aristocratic blood to the sentimental, maternal ideal and her chaste precursor. In that transition, the romantic ideology of marriage seemingly redeems the daughter's body from its bondage to the mercenary aristocratic model that Tess's Trantridge errand represents; however, Tess's racing and re-racing illuminate the way liberalism's new racial ideologies intersect with those of gender and class to, in effect, reenact the old aristocratic control of the female reproductive body anew, a control that liberal romance ideology belies.

<7>Before considering Hardy's direct invocations of "race" or his conversations with English literary tradition, other narrative elements—particularly landscapes—also bear a momentary examination as they, too, suggest the import of a racial thematic. If, as has been frequently asserted, Hardy routinely implies some kind of correspondence between his landscapes and the dramas his characters enact within them, then Tess's tragedy materializes across domestic and foreign landscapes inscribed with the crucial, contingent, and colonial operations of "race." For instance, Angel's emancipation from his intellectual slavery to the "the general principle" (333) of chastity as defining Tess's, or any woman's, worth occurs during his disastrous sojourn in Brazil. As a contemporary touchstone for that immigration, Hardy drew upon the agricultural colonization movement sponsored by the Brazilian government, an opportunity, according to the English press, of which many of Angel's non-fictional countrymen and women availed themselves, with results often far more catastrophic than his fictionalized one.⁽⁵⁾ Angel's transformation there—his revised valuation of Tess's "unintact state" (333)—has typically been credited to the influence of his more cosmopolitan traveling companion. While the representations of their relationship certainly affirm this influence, Angel's transformation nevertheless occurs within a country negotiating the altered meaning of its traditional racialized categories: the agricultural colonization movement that he exploited represents part of Brazil's confrontation with its history of slavery as it attempts to manage the labor shortages arising from abolition in the 1880s.⁽⁶⁾

<8>The details of another locale in *Tess* also encode the impact of European colonial and imperial history, this time on a domestic landscape. When Hardy describes "Talbothay's higher pastures" wilting under "Ethiopian scorchings" and the fields of Flintcomb Ash organized in "zebra-striped" patterns, that imagery, Jeff Nunokawa claims, directly invokes "the generic language of the tourbook" (79) and alters the commonplace view of Wessex as untouched by the imperial currents stirring Britain's more metropolitan areas. These descriptions evoke the "ancient and aboriginal regions of what is now known as the third world . . . popular destinations for travelers by the middle of the nineteenth century" (Nunokawa 79), and ones rendered increasingly accessible by the incursions of European explorers, missionaries, and capitalists. Even the portraits of Rolliver's lowly patrons are etched by a rhetoric echoing imperialist expansion and Anglo-Saxon superiority: when they empty their cups into the dust outside the Inn, Nunokawa asserts, "the dregs" assume the inchoate formations of a "Polynesia" (79). Wessex, as Hardy's narrator depicts it, is no more immune to imperialism's racialized imprints than it is to the domestic economic disruptions unsettling its indigenous inhabitants and lifestyles.

<9>However, it is Linda Shires's observation about Blackmoor Vale in Chapter 2 of *Tess* that points to race as a topos of epistemological inquiry. Hardy's introduction to the valley in that chapter, she asserts, "is neither simply figural nor symbolic . . ." (145); rather, the "drama enacted

there” recapitulates something like Angel’s experience in Brazil, “of coming to a new scene,” although in this case, that “coming to” is “enacted by readers rather than the nameless figures Hardy casts as tourists and painters . . .”(146). The Blackmoor confronting readers is literally constructed by the narrator’s shifting and often contradictory meteorological, historical, and geographical perspectives—an ironic, anti-romantic perspectival clash—initiating the reader into the novel’s decentered, modernist epistemology and which insists upon a reality “filtered by multiple and contradictory subject impressions . . .”(Shires 147). While Shires seems only minimally aware of her observation’s racialized implications, she nevertheless foregrounds that issue when she points to the socially-constructed nature of two of the vale’s names, Blakemore and Blackmoor, reminding us that their “meanings . . . are as historically conditioned as our impressions of people or events” (145).(7)

<10>In other words, in the Vale’s introduction we encounter multiple instances of naming arrested in the current, more overtly racialized signifier, Blackmoor, by which Hardy refers to the landscape thereafter.(8) Maintaining this name against its erasure by the Anglicized and “whiter” “Blakemore” emphasizes race in a way that “Blakemore” would not, especially given late nineteenth-century assumptions about whiteness as somehow “unraced” or as poised at the apex of the species’ developmental axis and thereby achieving the invisibility of a standard. If landscapes are in myriad ways inseparable from the human dramas they subtend, then Tess’s tragedy is suggestively embedded within the larger epistemological question of “race” emphasized here by retaining Blackmoor’s name.

<11> The eschewal of the more recent landscape name and the epistemological questions provoked by retaining the older one are also allied to Tess’s tragedy in another way: they prefigure attempts to rename Tess herself. These attempts are implicit in the thinly disguised matrimonial errand on which her parents send Tess to Trantridge, and they are explicit in Angel’s appeal, when he learns of her ancestry, for Tess to capitalize on “her extraction” and “spell [her] name correctly” as “Teresa d’Urberville” (198). As she had earlier, when Angel called her “Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half-teasingly,” Tess resists this renaming: “‘Call me Tess,’ she would say askance; and he did” (146). If we add considerations of race to Michael Ragussis’s observation about the nature of this relationship between characters and landscapes, then, we can say that the shifting and contested “status of Tess’s identity is reflected in the nature” of this equally shifting, contested, *and* racialized “landscape that plays so prominent a part in her story” (141)(9) and which, early on, posits race as a clear locus of contestation.

<12>This pressure of renaming exerted on both Tess and her racialized, natal landscape also points us towards one strand of Hardy’s dialogue with English novelistic tradition: his engagement with the name-found plot, a common element of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic and sentimental literary tradition, which he invokes and revises. This dialogue, in turn, provides one strand of that lengthy sociopolitical narrative the novel develops, where changing deployments of race function as guideposts in a centuries’-long transformation: from the demise of an aristocratic hegemony, bolstered by claims of blood purity, to the admittedly uneven developments of “the form of modern patriarchy,” which “depends upon the structural separation of the genders” (McKeon 300). The novel’s opening, for example—Durbeyfield’s genealogical discovery—reverses the usual sequence followed by bourgeois novels; they typically conclude, rather than begin, by revealing the obscured aristocratic family connections of a virtuous

protagonist (Ragussis 134). Moreover, in those earlier novels, the “name found” device anchored a plot-line in which “lineage always triumphs,” where “noble characters feel their rightful place in a social order despite the lowly status in which they were bred,” where “usurpers are punished,” and “rightful heirs reinstated” (Perry 309). This is definitively not the case for Tess. In bestowing that “name found,” Parson Tringham sets in motion the events culminating in her “loss of identity rather than . . . its recovery” (O’Toole 76). And that loss of identity is traceable, in part, through the ways she is raced and re-raced within the novel.

<13>The novel’s long sociopolitical chronology anchored by “race” begins when Hardy’s revised “name found plot” is immediately linked to an ancient, genealogical grounding for the concept; that is, his first and third invocations of the term point to a meaning that would have been prevalent in any pre- or early-modern context: a concept of “race” signifying a group of people sharing common ancestry or “stock.” This pre-modern meaning is initially evoked after the Parson informs Tess’s father that he is descended from “Sir Pagan d’Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror . . .” Tracing the d’Urberville line from an “ancestor” who “was one of the twelve knights who assisted the Lord of Estremavilla in Normandy in his conquest of Glamorganshire,” the Parson alludes to the family’s temporary decline “in Oliver Cromwell’s time,” but affirms their recuperation “in Charles the Second’s reign” when they “were made Knights of the Royal Oak for [their] loyalty” (31-32). This cornucopia of genealogical information immediately prompts Durbeyfield’s pathetic demands for the deference he believes due to “one of a noble race” (34)—Hardy’s first use of the term. The third use of “race” reiterates this genealogical signification, occurring when Tess seeks anonymity and work in the Valley of the Dairies; there Farmer Crick acknowledges that he had heard of “a family of some such name as yours . . . a old ancient race that had all but perished off the earth . . .”(124).

<14>Notwithstanding the “shifting and constantly contested terrain” (Loha 388) characterizing the history of racialized discourses, Nicholas Hudson locates the earliest evidence for this genealogical signification in classical and medieval ethnographies, adducing a connection between “race” and the Latin term “*gens*,” based on its etymological linkage to “*genero*, to beget or produce *Gens* was,” he asserts, “close in meaning to ‘race’ understood in the traditional sense of ‘lineage’ or ‘extraction’”(248). Agnes Smedley similarly relates the term’s “original meaning . . . to a breeding line of animals, a ‘stock’ or group of animals that was the product of a line bred for certain purposes . . .”(38). In this premodern context, then, “race” referred to lines of descent, their reproduction, and the oft observed but little understood phenomenon of inheritable traits that prompted the selective breeding of livestock. Unlike the eighteenth-century “belief that humanity is divided into only four or five main ‘races’” (Hudson 248), this term was routinely applied to any geographically distinct group. Assuming, like Farmer Crick, that indigenous populations remained close to their natal territories or else migrated en masse, “medieval and renaissance authors . . . commonly found as many ‘peoples’ as there were cities or kingdoms” (248) and ascribed any discernible, common characteristics to the effects of climate, geography, or topography.

<15>On the one hand, by evoking “race” in its premodern, genealogical frame, Hardy’s revised name-found plot affirms the Durbeyfield’s aristocratic ancestry; on the other, along with conferring that genealogical distinction, the Parson’s chronology of the d’Urberville fortunes also

sketches the historical deconstruction of blood and genealogy as a governing political paradigm, a deconstruction that correlates with the rise of the middle-class, its construction of a new, virtuous female ideal, and the redeployment of race in new and broader biological taxonomies. (10)

<16>As the “Battle Abbey Roll,” which the Parson has obviously studied, or as “the Pipe Rolls in the time of King Stephen” (31-32) demonstrate, certain genealogies confer political and historical visibility. The documents he cites also remind us that the premodern era tended to identify its ruling families with the idea of “nation” and, consequently, to view the history of a “nation” as the history of its ruling families, those who, Foucault tells us, located their origins in “a certain Trojan myth” (*Society* 75). Underwritten by the “virtual episteme” (Bloch 65) of genealogy, these rolls and family histories constructed Europe’s nascent nation-states as the geopolitical legacy of Troy’s surviving and scattered heroes and claimed the genealogical purity of that connection as the basis for political authority. The bodily analogue to these genealogies — indeed, their subject matter — was aristocratic blood, the material substance asserting a literal connection to those scattered heroes of legend. This blood, Foucault contends, derived its symbolic valence from the undeniable reality of military conquest and from “the honor of war” those conquests presumably evinced; its value must have also accrued from the idea if not the reality of stability that the trope of blood genealogies suggested: the appeal of representations affirming “the continuance of the corporeal body social” (Laqueur 121) against a feudal backdrop of endemic “famine, epidemics, and violence” (Foucault, *History* 147). Fanciful and contrived as they often were, then, these “blood” genealogies *were* history, the only secular, political history that mattered or that was, in fact, being written.

<17>When the downtrodden Durbeyfield discovers his unknown kinship to “the noble race” of the Norman d’Urbervilles, he lords his new sense of entitlement over a passing country boy. That reaction ironically recapitulates the way in which his actual premodern counterparts — those who had occupied a sociopolitical reality similar to Durbeyfield’s own present circumstance, *not* that of his lineal ancestors — had invoked the trope of race as, in Foucault’s words, a “counter-discourse” or “counter-history” (*Society* 70) against particular genealogical claims of cultural authority. Angel implicitly alludes to the English version of this counter-history — the well-known “myth of the Norman yoke” — when he and Tess deliver Talbothay’s milk to the train station where Tess discloses her ancestral secret. In his history lesson, Angel refers to Durbeyfield’s historical socioeconomic counterparts — again not his lineal ones — when he alludes to “the unrecorded rank and file of the English nation” (197), implicitly referring to the Anglo-Saxon “race” once presumably languishing under Norman rule. This is the group, Angel declares, from whom he would have preferred Tess to have been descended, largely, we can infer, because he desired her to have no history except what he, in his idealized imaginings, would supply.

<18>But it is precisely within this premodern context to which Angel refers where invocations of “race” began to serve a momentarily liberatory function. That “unrecorded rank and file,” who heretofore possessed little or no official political valence, mobilized claims of race against a sovereign historicity and its Norman institutions underwritten by a “belief in blood before everything” (197), to use Angel’s own words again. The rank and file of England seized on the trope of race-as-genealogy to assert the validity of contesting ancestral claims, this time in the

name of the Anglo-Saxon “race.” Prying representations of the Norman invasion loose from their legitimizing Trojan frame, this contest reconstructs that conquest as the violation of pre-existing Saxon rights and the theft of Saxon lands (Foucault, *Society* 75-77).(11)

<19>The political utility of the myth of the Norman yoke, Christopher Hill argues, persisted far beyond these premodern origins. Mobilized not only against “the institutions of mediaeval society,” it also provided one of the most influential and “entirely secular” (57) tropes in the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century contests “between the crown, the aristocracy, Parliament, and the third estate” (121-22). The Parson’s observation that the d’Urbervilles “declined a little in Oliver Cromwell’s time but to no serious extent” (32), points back to this early modern contest of conflicting racialized claims, which ultimately transfigured genealogy’s political valence. Once the genealogical grounding of this discourse of “race” served its politically revolutionary purpose, genealogy and its more overt supports of blood claims and birth are refuted as the basis of political privilege, opening the way for modernity’s liberal discourses of equality in difference.

<20>Paradoxically, as the Parson’s qualifier, “but to no serious extent,” suggests, the hierarchical operations of blood and race, authorized by that “aristocratic assumption of inequality” (McKeon 315), do not disappear. In the new racialized, classed, and gendered domains that the middle class will erect, the essentialized functions of aristocratic blood will persist—localized in other essentialized bodies and claims. The prior aristocratic operations of “race” as a form of social stratification will be redeployed within biology’s new developmental hierarchies, articulated from new, middle-class subject positions and about new objects created within the expansive logic of liberalism’s new “family of man.” Race, in short, will retain and encode hierarchical meanings, and its discourses will, by the late nineteenth century, intersect with and at times become indistinguishable from those of gender and class. One particular metamorphosis of “racial” qualities into “gendered” qualities occurring with genealogy’s demise as the prime political idiom concerns the relocation of the blood virtue once localized in aristocratic caste. It will be transformed into the moral virtue of the middle-class maternal ideal: while she will embody aristocracy in the moral register, that idealization will nonetheless obscure the political ends her reproductive body serves. That body will retain the same functional essence as the aristocratic, female figure against which the middle-class, paradoxically, erects its new class ideal.

<21>*Tess’s* at times sensational discourse of blood maps this transfer of status: from the spectacular body of the aristocratic daughter, essential to maintaining the blood purity of the aristocratic caste, it passes to the new middle-class, selfless maternal ideal, “the lynchpin” (10), Mary Poovey says, of middle-class ideology. This discourse of blood to which I refer comprises part of what J. Hillis Miller has identified as the “chain of red things in the novel.” He reads this chain, which includes signifiers other than blood, as Hardy’s philosophical endorsement of the “Immanent Will . . . the marks made by that creative and destructive energy underlying events . . .”(67-68); however, the novel’s frequent and conflicting invocations of Tess’s aristocratic heritage suggest that the “chain” also engages with that old aristocratic discourse of blood symbolics and its transfiguration into middle-class codes of gender and sexuality.

<22>When Tess is sent to Trantridge, for instance, the mystique of blood and the import of

genealogy that underwrote the pre-modern, aristocratic, “racial” dispensation are the properties on which the “shiftless house of Durbeyfield” (47) pins its hopes: this “comely sample of ‘d’Urberville blood” (71) is sent as the “stock” to be bred to seal a connection with a set of faux relations and to remedy the Durbeyfield’s economic distress. When Tess returns with news of her employment at the Slopes, her father’s assumption about what the offer portends is conveyed in similar terms: for Durbeyfield, her employment represents the beginning of a courtship—Alec’s “serious thoughts about improving his blood by linking on to the old line” (68).

<23>In this context, Tess’s lower-middle-class body is reinscribed as an aristocratic vehicle, as Ragussis rightly asserts—“a body in the service of a name, the family name” (136). What is demanded of Tess on her errand—the heightened display of the female exterior, her reproductive potential, and hereditary “blood” put in the service of a family name; the suppression of any personal sentiment to the contrary; and the overt motive of economic improvement—all recapitulate the fundamental feature of aristocratic alliances: the explicit conjunction of the sexual/reproductive plot with the political/economic one.⁽¹²⁾ One particularly painful moment in Tess’s return from Trantridge also reaffirms the aristocratic tenor of that “service.” Although Hardy casts the opulence that provokes a derisive comment from one of Tess’s “fellow travelers” (65) in terms of natural, “raw” abundance rather than the more stylized emblems of wealth, such as jewels or fine cloth, Tess’s appearance nevertheless invokes the image of the aristocratic daughter’s body, displayed to elicit the proper caste alliances. When Tess is mocked as “quite a posy!” (65), that remark awakens her to the ostentatious display that Alec had arranged, of “roses at her breast; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim” (65). Chagrined, Tess realizes “the spectacle she presented” (65), and she senses, if not altogether comprehending, the remark’s implication of sexual impropriety.

<24>Both her dawning sense of impropriety and her earlier unease with the implicit purpose of her errand to “claim kin” (57) signal the dissonance between a middle-class ideology of romance, long since installed within the courtship plot, and her reenactment of the once socially legitimized mechanism for economic and political consolidation her d’Urberville forebears had practiced. On a broader cultural level, her dissonant experience also symptomizes the ambiguous position created for her and others like her by the “capitalistic transformation of the English countryside” (McKeon 298), a painful metamorphosis whose uneven developments are a staple of every Wessex novel. In *Tess*, these uneven developments are evinced not only by the Durbeyfield’s near destitution, a result of “the shift from a status-based society to a class-based society and from a land-based agrarian economy to a cash-based market economy” (Perry 29), but also by their reliance upon this traditional enactment of kinship obligations. In other words, while it is true that the economic transformation referred to above also effectively “restructur[ed] kinship from a consanguineal to a conjugal basis for family identity” (Perry 29), from father-based patriarchy to husband-based patriarchy, such alterations were not uniform across culture. As Michael McKeon reminds us, “the sexual division of labor (and hence the establishment of domestic ideology) proceeded more slowly at the lower social ranks . . .” common people clung, with increasing tenacity, to the traditional criterion of customary rights and privileges” (304). The aristocratic model Tess’s Trantridge errand reenacts certainly persisted among Britain’s pedigreed families, who managed to maintain themselves in an economically viable fashion through such alliances. But with very different societal judgments accruing, this premodern and nonromantic model of alliance also figured into the survival

mechanisms of those at lower socioeconomic levels as well. Their experiences of late nineteenth-century economic reality left them without the wherewithal to adhere to middle-class prescriptions of romantic and moral propriety even if, like Tess, they aspired to.(13)

<25> Like the residual aristocratic tenor of Tess's kinship errand, evidence of this recourse to "customary rights and privileges" is also signaled by Durbeyfield's investment in the body of his horse, whose name invokes a noble rank associated with a premodern dispensation: after Prince's death, the narrator informs us, Tess's father refuses to sell his "carcase" to the knacker: "'when we d'Urbervilles was knights in the land,'" he protests, "'we didn't sell our chargers for cat's meat . . .'"(56-57). Within the novel's discourse of blood, the death of the Durbeyfield's Prince acquires a double significance: it not only precipitates Tess's "aristocratic" errand to Trantridge, but it also encodes one of the most potent mechanisms whereby the mystical legitimacy conferred by aristocratic blood is transfigured into a new, middle-class emblem of female virtue—into the moral aristocracy of the chaste maiden and the selfless maternal ideal—an icon directly opposed to the aristocratic role and the consanguineal obligations Tess embodies on her errand to the Slopes.

<26>In the shrouded scene of Prince's death, vaguely evoking the contours of a joust, the poor beast is impaled by "the morning mail-cart . . . speeding along" the road Tess and Abraham travel. While they slept, "the pointed shaft of the cart . . . entered the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword," and they awaken to see "his life's blood . . . spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road" (55). The transition from aristocratic to bourgeois hegemony is encoded in the polyvalent word "mail": that is, the figurative "arrow and shaft" and the "sword" that kills (the) Prince first recall the term's medieval signification as the armor and weaponry of feudal knights, the caste upholding aristocratic claims to territory and political prerogative, a regime of power that overtly "spoke through blood" (Foucault, *History* 147). The piecemeal and discontinuous form of power signified by the culture of such "mail" is, however, redeployed here as an object circulating within a much more highly regularized grid of relations, signified by "mail" of a different order—that which is synonymous with letters or correspondence. At the most abstract level, then, Prince's apparently random death figuratively dramatizes the early modern shift in the mechanisms and locus of power—from the piecemeal coercion of blood/military might—to what Nancy Armstrong designates as modernity's more pervasive subjectivizing apparatus: the dissemination of "language, particularly the printed word . . ." (25). (14)

<27>Even more specifically, this play upon the word "mail" also suggests it as a figure for another strand of the English novel tradition with which Hardy dialogues: eighteenth-century epistolary novels played a crucial role in the creation of the new middle-class, naturalized gendered dispensation, a transformation Armstrong also elucidates. Epistolary novels, like Richardson's *Pamela*, she maintains, helped depoliticize heterosexual unions by undermining the model of aristocratic alliances that Tess's errand to The Slopes invokes. When these novels "began to represent an individual's value in terms of his, but more often in terms of *her*, essential qualities of mind," rather than in terms of blood status, such representations helped erode the "intricate status system that had long dominated British thinking . . ." (Armstrong 4). The trope of their resistance to the aristocratic men bent on their sexual exploitation in these novels also unifies the bourgeois women embodying this new interiority, these "essential qualities of mind."

And when these exemplary females transform their antagonists into masculine proponents of their female sexual purity, this transformation, says Armstrong, both reflects and constructs “a new form of political power,” one that severs “the language of sexual relations from the language of politics” and “subordinate[s] all social differences to those based on gender” as opposed to rank (3-4).

<28>The relocation of virtue—from blood to gender—breeds the inchoate shame that Tess feels after the “posy” remark concerning her surface spectacle; that spectacle and Tess’s response also suggest the way in which the kind of woman Tess’s rose and strawberry abundance mimes was negatively repositioned in a new socio-sexual hierarchy of values: as is well-known, the “virtue” that “was increasingly articulated upon gender,” (Poovey 10) accrued primarily to the maternal figure. In her name the “most important work” of the middle-class female “was increasingly represented as the emotional labor motivated (and guaranteed) by maternal instinct” (Poovey 10). In contrast, the traditional opulence of the aristocratic woman, whose role Tess’s Trantridge errand reprises, suffered: representing “material instead of moral value . . . idle sensuality instead of constant vigilance and tireless concern for the well-being of others,” such a woman, Armstrong tells us, was subsequently reconstituted as “not truly female” at all (20).

<29>The representation of Alec’s murder—the second prominent scene of bloodshed within the novel’s discourse of blood—similarly figures the relocation of value and virtue from aristocratic blood to the middle-class sentimental, maternal figure and, more broadly, to the sentimentalized ideal of marriage. Focalized through the eyes of Mrs. Brooks, the “householder” of The Herons where Alec and Tess had been living, the sign of the murder—the “scarlet blot” that assumes the shape of a particular card—materializes as Mrs. Brooks gazes up at the “oblong white ceiling” of her sitting room (370). Albeit flowing from Tess’s faux-aristocratic “cousin,” this particular card is composed of the literal and symbolic bodily fluid that once underwrote the privilege of Tess’s Norman ancestors, a connection affirmed by this card’s metonymic linkage to other cards describing Tess, each bearing aristocratic connotations.(15)

<30> Precisely where that “aristocratic” blood virtue and the political power it once emblemized is repositioned is revealed when Alec’s blood assumes the shape of a “gigantic ace of hearts” (370), the prime signifier of sentiment, increasingly associated with the virtue of the middle-class mother and, by the eighteenth century, represented as the natural grounds for matrimony. The curious, liminal positioning of that bloody heart at the Herons—calling attention, simultaneously, to floor and ceiling—also locates it as an apt symbol of a violent transition. In a political register it is perhaps analogous to Britain’s singular moment of regicide or, more broadly, to an era of bloody sectarian conflict, with its obvious connection to the demise of aristocratic hegemony and the rise of the bourgeoisie. This is the Cromwellian era in which, as Parson Tringham informs Durbeyfield, his aristocratic descendants “declined a little” (32).

<31>However, that liminal position and the murderous signification of the heart itself also encode the desperate survival scenario for many women that the new middle-class romance ideology occluded. The out-of-proportion adulation for Angel that drives Tess’s “chamber mates” (222)—Izz, Retty, and Marian—to drink and near suicide after the couple’s wedding suggests not only the triumph of the romance ideology, the notion that “the meaning” of a woman’s life would be found “in consciousness heightened not so much by religion as by love in

a domestic context” (Perry 218); but the milkmaid’s desperate reactions, like “the endless variations on the theme” of marital love in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, also appear to “register not just the mesmerizing appeal of romantic love and individualism in a society just unleashing the enormous power of these possibilities,” but, says Ruth Perry, “the urgent need of women to find a safe berth, to land somewhere, to relocate domestic life in an establishment other than their families of origin” (220).

<32>That is, the bloodiness of the heart insists upon a visceral material and economic reality that the romance ideology papers over: it points to another effect of that capitalistic transformation of the English countryside, which was to exclude women, especially those at the lower social strata, from “traditional realms of work” (Perry 218). Technological and industrial innovations, such as the threshing machine or the turnip slicer that Hardy depicts, along with the loss of common land enforced by enclosures, increased the competition between men and women for those jobs traditionally regarded as female labor. And with the decline of economic opportunity, “an insistence on virginity,” such as that which grounds Angel’s condemnation of Tess, “is linked to women’s specialization as sexual beings” (Perry 36). Consequently, the bloody heart figures the visceral consequences of the romance ideology for many lower-class women, a larger labor narrative that Tess’s work history and her affective history together inscribe. Her failure to carry out her errand as the aristocratic daughter marks her entry into a world of increasingly limited but not altogether absent economic opportunity: Talbothay’s is on the near horizon. After an abortive marriage to Angel, however, one premised on romantic choice—not, as in her misalliance with Alec, compelled by the demands of her kin—her economic choices grow fewer and more arduous. The “joyless monotony” (308) of Flintcomb-Ash and her near-starvation while Angel is in Brazil epitomize the cruel circumscription of opportunity that drives her into her private life with Alec.

<33>The bloody heart materializing in that liminal space at The Herons insists that blood matters, then, not just in a moral, even Biblical register, demanding justice for Alec’s mortally violated body; it also graphically directs our attention to where the symbolic value of aristocratic blood, signifying a privileged caste, was reinscribed within England’s sociohistorical narrative. Signifying part of the deconstruction of race understood as genealogy, that bloody heart also encodes the ramifications of middle-class hegemony for women. If the aristocracy had overtly politicized the daughter’s body as the site linking reproduction to political and economic hegemony, then the middle-class appears to renounce this politicized use. It appears to claim a moral high ground on behalf of women when the sexually chaste woman who ascends to maternity in the context of the “ideal of love-in-marriage” is installed as its icon (Perry 36). However fulfilling that role might have proven for some women, its idealization and romanticization also redeploy and obscure the ideology that subtends it as a means of control over her reproductive body—reproductive of bodies and of the social structure.(16)

<34>A reproductive topos is precisely where Hardy’s second invocation of “race” situates Tess when it depicts her nursing the illegitimate “Sorrow” during a break from her work in the grain field. As with his treatment of the “name-found” plot, however, he perverts the ready sentimentality inspired by that maternal tableau so dear to the middle-class Victorian heart by alluding to the negative effects of Tess’s “race”: the narrator qualifies that maternal picture when he distinguishes Tess as “an almost standard woman, but for the slight incautiousness of

character inherited from her race” (109). That is, the episode juxtaposes genealogy to maternity and figures the former as the impediment to Tess’s successful adequation to that middle-class ideal. When Penny Boumelha reminds us that many of Hardy’s contemporaries took him to task precisely over his representation of Tess’s maternal failures, their reactions affirm the middle-class construction of the “standard” woman, the norm, as the premaritally chaste and then appropriately maternal woman: affronted not only by Tess’s “ambivalence” to “Sorrow,” which combined an appropriate “passionateness” with an inappropriate “contempt,” they were also disturbed by “the failure of motherhood in itself to determine the subsequent course of her experience” (Boumelha 119). In the context of that maternal norm, Hardy’s description seems to imply that something passed down to Tess from her family, something inherited “from her race,” as the term has been previously invoked, interferes with her fulfillment of this norm.

<35>In this light, the novel’s second invocation of “race” could be read as evidence of Hardy’s allegiance to genetic determinism, such as it was being articulated at the end of the nineteenth century in texts like August Weisman’s *Essays Upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*, for example. And the critical literature on *Tess* is full of interpretations that account for her fate according to such a logic: in a Darwinian world, such readings go, she is a victim of natural selection. She either lacks the traits that would have ensured her adaptation and survival at this particular moment, or she has inherited others that doom her.⁽¹⁷⁾ However, to ascribe this biologized meaning to an invocation of “race” that itself occurs between two invocations signifying a pre-biologized “family” and to ignore its juxtaposition with maternity moves, I think, too quickly. It obscures the political history the juxtaposition inscribes. That is, what this fouling of Tess’s maternity by “her race” invokes is two opposing paradigms of value—that instantiated by genealogical race versus the maternal ideal. It is sociopolitical, not biological, determinism that is being invoked here. This juxtaposition, like the bloody heart at the Herons, reminds us of the historical transfer of blood virtue from a dispensation in which race was understood as genealogy and in which genealogy was, politically, *all* to the new regimes emphasizing gender.

<36>Further calling into question Hardy’s allegiance to biological determinism is his letter to journalist and editor Henry William Massingham penned around the time Hardy began work on *Tess*. In that letter Hardy reveals his awareness of the discursive construction of the sentimental ideal, “the doll of English fiction,” a figure he vows to “demolish” in *Tess* (*Letters* 250). That awareness about social as much as genetic determination, which is evinced throughout the novel, certainly suggests Hardy’s skepticism about the naturalness of the maternal standard by which Tess allegedly falls short. Moreover, while the racialized “incautiousness” that presumably spoils Tess’s maternity almost certainly points back to her aristocratically-coded misalliance with Alec, the only evidence of ancestral “incautiousness” the text depicts is that constructed by the social *position* of her ancestral class: her male aristocratic ancestors’ exercise of social entitlement, most often in the context of *droit de seigneur* and her family’s resurrection of those ancestral, privileges using Tess’s body when they send her to the Slopes. The socially-constructed nature of any ancestral “incautiousness” and Hardy’s awareness of the British novel’s role in constructing the Victorian female standard situate this invocation of “race” in the maternal tableau as yet another example of the sociopolitical transformation of “blood,” where the virtue once ascribed to aristocratic blood is reinvested in middle-class female chastity and appropriate maternity. That is, Tess’s failure to achieve a standard of maternal behavior as a

function of her “race” points to the political antagonism between two political paradigms of virtue—one based on blood and genealogy, which sent Tess to Trantridge, and that secured by the middle-class female ideal by which Angel will condemn her. The juxtaposition, I would argue, does not allow the modern biologized body on which genetic determinism depends to occlude the history of its own discursive emergence, but rather reminds us of that history. The juxtaposition and opposition of the maternal to Tess’s aristocratic “race” also suggest the way in which gender in the new middle-class dispensation emerges “as absolutely incompatible with kinship, where it had once been a subordinated factor determining human identity” (Levy 59).

<37>So far, my reading of this transfer of virtue from aristocratic blood to the middle-class ideal has largely focused on domestic developments, ones motivated by the political delegitimation of the race-as-genealogy discourse. However, as subsequent invocations of “race” will demonstrate, Tess’s fate is also undeniably implicated in what Foucault colorfully calls colonialism’s “boomerang effect”: that is, early European colonialists certainly depended upon “the older notion of race articulating a lineage-based system of entitlements and privileges” (Liu 271) as a model for governing subjugated populations; however, the West will subsequently deploy “a whole series of colonial models” on itself, resulting in “something resembling . . . an internal colonialism . . .” (Foucault, *Society* 103). In other words, when the old aristocratic assumptions of blood-based inequality lose legitimacy in a domestic political context, liberalism’s ascent will require new rationales for hierarchy. If “race” was once coterminous with lineage, with a blood linkage conferring a particular caste identification, a particular social “essence” and authority we might say, then by the late nineteenth century, new racialized constructions will be firmly in place; they will continue the “caste” assumption but in new discourses and along new axes of difference. Inflected by colonial models, they will locate “essences” not in an *a priori*, divinely ordained, metaphysical structure or in claims of legendary ancestry but find them in the differently marked gendered and racialized bodies of liberalism’s “family of man.”

<38>In her *Other Women: The Writing of Race, Class and Gender, 1832-1898*, for example, Anita Levy identifies a key contradiction within liberalism’s new and “all-pervasive biological humanism . . .” (52) While it seemingly dispenses with “hierarchical distinctions between human beings” (52), race and gender will, nonetheless, be constructed hierarchically by those subscribing to the new developmental view of all biological life. In other words, many biologists and anthropologists will collapse cultures into “nature,” identifying and equating stages in “the history of the civilizing process” with “the history of the development of the human species” (McWhorter 11). These stages will be assimilated to a racialized theory of civilization that not only organizes human into fewer and larger groups hierarchized according to “civilized” achievements, but which also suggested fruitful analogies between race and gender. Nancy Stepan’s study of nineteenth-century scientific discourse finds, for instance, that gender was perceived to be so “remarkably analogous to race . . . that the scientist could use racial difference to explain gender difference and vice versa” (39). In this broad analogical operation, the “lower races” were thought to embody “the female type of the human species and females the ‘lower race of the gender’ . . . Woman was the conservative element to man’s progressiveness, preserving the more ‘primitive’ traits found in lower races, while men of higher races led the way in new biological and cultural directions” (Stepan 40). Such analogical theorizing served as one way to “legitimate as natural the real world of male domination of women” when the old

“transcendental order or time-immemorial custom became a less and less plausible justification . . .” (Laqueur 196, 152).

<39>Hardy’s fourth invocation of “race,” depicting Tess’s journey to Talbothays after the death of “Sorrow,” moves us further along in the sociohistorical narrative of race that the novel inscribes; it clearly evinces anthropological and biological inflections—those which fluidly consolidate race, gender, and class identifications. In this scene, Tess has left Marlott to escape the censure she imagines surrounding her tragic pregnancy. Her idyllic surroundings mitigate those feelings, however, and inspire her to sing. Happily chanting portions of “the psalter that her eyes had so often wandered over of a Sunday morning before she had eaten of the tree of knowledge” (121), her singing breaks off when she imagines a disjunct between the state of her soul and the moral tradition represented by the hymn. These descriptions are quickly recast in a racialized register, however, when the narrator employs the rhetoric of anthropology to account for her choice of song: that “half-unconscious rhapsody,” the narrator asserts, “was a Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic setting.” Tess chooses the song, moreover, because she is one of those “women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature,” and who, therefore, “retain in their souls far more of the Pagan Fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at a later date” (121).

<40>While earlier invocations of “race” had emphasized Tess’s aristocratic lineage, her *specific* genealogical line, the concept of “race” invoked in the psalter scene appears to refer not to a specific family tree or line of descent but rather to the expanding demographics of increasingly fewer racial groupings proposed by biology and anthropology: those “pagan” forefathers—the antecedent of “race” here—belong not just to Tess but to all women who live and work out-of-doors; in short, to non-middle-class women. Hardy’s use of the word “fetich” [sic] also adds to Tess’s racialized and primitivized femaleness: although we are most familiar with the term from psychoanalytic discourse, the concept is an appropriation from African culture and language. Its etymology derives from the culture of the Guinea coast, where seventeenth-century explorers, slavers, and nascent anthropologists, who followed the work of scholars like C. de Brosses in his 1760 *Le Culte des Dieux Fetiches*, for example, interpreted the “fetish” as any object unduly or improperly invested with the power to satisfy a particular desire; or, as the *OED* states: “an inanimate object worshipped by primitive peoples on account of its supposed inherent magical power, or as being animated by a spirit.” This logic and this rhetoric render Tess’s choice of song as not merely charmingly naïve or as innocently childlike, but as a racially primitive act of magical thinking.

<41>Again, if we do not ignore the prior signification of “race” as originally applied to Tess, signifying a specific genealogy, and if we do not read that earlier signification as “corrected” by the clarifying discoveries of science but still resonant here as evidence of the cultural and political antagonisms that would be papered over by the new history of the species, then we can see what is repressed in these new naturalized, racialized categories that intersect, here, with gender and class. In an instance of ideological mystification that obscures liberalism’s hierarchical sexual politics, Tess is “re-raced” as a primitive, as a “woman,” to situate her, in middle-class ideology, as a locus for control.(18)

<42>Explaining the choice of her song in this scene as “fetichistic” not only places Tess in the

anthropologically “primitivized” category of “woman,” however; it also situates her within a larger European demographic, that of her remote forefathers (one of whom bore the name “Pagan”), which is simultaneously being “re-raced.”(19) In this particular “boomerang effect,” nineteenth-century anthropological discourses of “racial” difference not only constructed the non-European others as their object; they also recast the historical alliance practices of European aristocracy as racially primitive. If, as Peter Wade argues, the notion of “race” coalesces around “notions about relatedness through bodily substance and intersects powerfully with ideas about sex, sexual reproduction, and family” (98), then sexual arrangements offer a prime site for adducing degrees of “racialized” civilization. And this is the site seized upon by anthropology, taking the current middle-class gendered dispensation as a developmental apex of civilization. Under such a standard, the old “political language of kinship,” one that linked “the sexual and the political” and paid “less heed to the logic of gender differences than . . . to the metaphysical purity of the individual and the cultural body” (Levy 58) is transformed into “the material of nature and primitivized”(Levy 65). As “the social fact of gender is shifted from the political domain of kinship to the natural domain” (Levy 66), the kind of alliance Tess’s errand to “claim kin” represents “is remolded as an earlier, more primitive version of the modern gender system” (Levy 66).

<43>The novel’s most overt example of this anthropological re-racing and primitivizing of the English aristocratic past occurs in the description of the “life-size portraits” of “ladies of the d’Urberville family” (222-23); these line the walls of Tess’s “ancestral mansion” (222) where she and Angel spend their disastrous wedding night (222). This episode is crucial for two reasons: the features of these female portraits clearly depict the anthropological logic of primitivizing—to the point of animalizing—the aristocracy; more broadly, however, the anxiety the portraits evoke in the narrator and Angel suggests these portraits as a locus of the uncanny, the return of a particular repressed: the reality of liberalism’s sexual control of women, which aligns it with, rather than distinguishing it from, the sexual practices of the old aristocracy.

<44>The portrait’s unsettling effects on the narrator are abundantly clear when he admits that “the long pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of merciless treachery; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other, suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity” have the ability to “haunt the beholder afterwards in his dreams” (222). Angel’s view of these animalistic women is, at first, more ambivalent: he is initially able to discern Tess’s “fine features” in the portraits’ “exaggerated forms” (222). However, after Tess’s confession, their hyperbolic dimension collapses into an affirmation of her gendered failures. When Angel returns from their alienated evening walk to confront another of the paintings “over the entrance to Tess’s bedchamber,” the sexualized connotations of its location, the revelation of Tess’s sexual history, and the primitivized aristocratic forms dovetail in a single indictment: like the narrator, Angel detects a “Sinister design . . . in the woman’s features, a concentrated purpose of revenge on the other sex—so it seemed to him then” (238).

<45>The anxieties that Angel and the narrator feel could be provoked by a variety of factors: the animalistic aggression they discern in the paintings could, for example, be read as the women’s undisguised response to their roles as economic and political chattel, to being exploited as breeding stock. Their haunting lineaments, in fact, suggest more than ill-favored physiques; rather they suggest that these women are keenly aware of the ends to which their bodies are put.

And exploitation always breeds the fear of reprisal on the part of those who are exploited—thus, the vengeance that Angel discerns directed at “the other sex.”

<46>However, were he not in some sense aware of a kindred exploitation persisting in the modern sexual double-standard he enjoys—the uncanny presence of the familiar within the unfamiliar—there would be no reason for Angel to be so disturbed. Moreover, when he connects this “vengeance” to Tess’s sexual allure—when he sees, prefigured in “the Caroline bodice of the portrait,” the bodice of Tess’s gown, “tucked” in earlier that evening to show off his wedding gift of a necklace (238)—he ignores the fact that he was the one who instructed Tess how to lower her bodice. That seemingly inconsequential moment of forgetfulness epitomizes the broader cultural authority Angel, as a white, middle-class male, enjoys. That is, his privilege derives from the developmental view of civilization and the species—a discourse that collapses all histories into a single, essentialized narrative of “nature” and installs white masculinity at its apex. Forgetting his role in the sexualizing of Tess, in this instance, symptomizes a greater repression. To suture the liberal claim of human equality over aristocratic tyranny, he discounts his position in the social hierarchy, a position that endows him with the privilege of constructing others as desirable, moral, or not. He upholds a standard that enchains Tess to pre-marital chastity as the definitive element of any honorable female sexual history, while he remains free to mitigate his own shame with a sense of entitlement to pre-marital dalliance in his own.

<47>Angel’s and the narrator’s characterizations of these portraits and the anxiety they elicit suggest the fragility of a particular middle-class construct of “woman,” a fragility echoed in Angel’s condemnation, when he characterizes Tess’s sexual transgression as a “want of firmness” (236). That comment no doubt refers to Tess’s yielding to Alec in *The Chase*; however, the fact that the judgment acquires its heft against a backdrop of the anthropological primitivizing of aristocratic women also reveals Angel’s studied repression of several distinct histories. One is his own happy history with Tess; another is his awareness of her personal chronicle of economic struggle and her sense of familial obligations, circumstances about which he concedes that she was “more sinned against than sinning” (235). Those particular histories are, nonetheless, anthropologically dissolved into a naturalized account of a newly primitivized, deviant sexuality, for which he finds support in the “animalistic” avatars depicted in the portraits.⁽²⁰⁾ When he aligns Tess’s “want of firmness” with her ancestor’s decline—“decrepit families imply decrepit will, decrepit conduct” (236)—his accusation not only echoes the requisite liberal antagonism to the aristocracy, but also betrays the way in which the anthropological logic upon which his reading depends obliterates numerous histories, subsuming them within a narrative of developmental “nature.” What suffers from a “want of firmness,” from a secure and absolute ground, is the middle-class ideology of “woman” upon which his morality depends.

<48>Like Angel’s earlier and vacillating judgments about how or what Tess’s aristocracy signifies, this “want of firmness” captures the fragility of and the anxiety generated by the hierarchical reality of liberalism’s putatively “equalizing” regimes of gendered and racialized difference, affirmed in and through biology and anthropology by the time of *Tess*’s publication. The knowledge repressed in those contradictions and which confronts Angel in those unsettling female portraits is this: the middle-class gendered dispensation, where control over female bodies is exerted by the twin engines of a morally idealized maternity and chastity, on the one hand, and scientific assertions of female primitiveness, on the other, is a political not a natural

phenomenon. While the blood virtue of the “racial” aristocrat has been transferred and localized in the moral mother and her chaste precursor, those idealized, middle-class female bodies are as regulated as the aristocratic daughters framed in Tess’s ancestral home.

<49>Like the paintings that presumably capture the likeness and contain the animalistic aggression of the women who frighten Angel, Hardy’s last invocation of race—this time denoting a competition—can also be read as a final figure for that history in which changing discourses of “race” coincide with changing strategies for containing female agency and shoring up threatened gender and class hierarchies.(21) Briefly, the consonance between this social history etched in *Tess*’s pages and the myth of Atalanta’s race, invoked by the “carved running figures” (376) on the headboard at Bramshurst Court, can be discerned if we consider, first, the pretext for that mythical race: it is prompted by Atalanta’s “first blow” in the hunt for the famously fierce Caledonian boar, a gesture that incites the jealousy of her male counterparts. While Atalanta subsequently sets the terms of the ensuing race to stress her maligned hunting and athletic prowess, the imposition of marriage, implying a subordinate position for her, frames the race as a way to reassert the gendered differences that her skills threaten to conflate. Tess’s environment similarly depicts a local culture in which traditional class and gendered distinctions are being blurred by the same economic and cultural forces disturbing identities in the countryside beyond the novel. In such a metamorphic context, Peter Widdowson observes, Hardy’s novels frequently “hinge on” the relationships between individuals in uncertain class positions (205), ambiguities that bear on gendered identities as well. Like the challenge represented by Atalanta’s prowess, “the most potentially destabilizing force” in Tess’s world as well is “the rising dynamic of women,” a group that routinely incurs the most destructive costs of those ambiguities (Widdowson 215-16).

<50>In the mythical context of destabilized gender identities, the mean by which Hippomenes alters Atalanta’s original terms for the race also follows a dynamic similar to what we see in the middle-class deployment of the romance ideology. That is, when Hippomenes tosses out the golden apples provided by Aphrodite, they profoundly alter the nature of the race. They supplant the terms foregrounding what we would regard as Atalanta’s “masculine” attributes, her ability to compete on a masculine terrain, or what her jealous hunting competitors view as male prerogative. While there is not a strict equation between the effects of these mythical apples—what they might signify in a Grecian mythical context as opposed to how they would be read in a late-nineteenth-century British one—the apples do, nonetheless, operate like the middle-class romance ideology inasmuch as, in each case, a reified, idealized heterosexual relationship is associated with changes in what a “race” signifies. In the mythical race, physical competition is supplanted by erotic appeal. In the shift from the premodern to the modern dispensation, the romance ideology arises with the decline of the aristocracy and their genealogical authority, displaced by the anthropological and biological expansion of race from lineage to encompass broader cultural groups arranged on a “civilized” axis.(22)

<51>As this paper has explored, the middle-class, moral idealization of proper maternity and the general ideology of romance that subtends that idealization obscure specific liberal inequalities. Economic opportunities for women at all levels of the social hierarchy are increasingly subordinated to her new, specifically sexualized and maternal functions, and like their aristocratic sisters decried by middle-class morality, middle-class women and all who are evaluated

according to her standard still function under the controlling sign of aristocracy, albeit a new one: that is, with the decline of genealogy as political capital, her reproductive blood becomes the site of middle-class *virtue* where the sexual, the political, and the economic are once again linked, reproducing the middle-class social order.

<52>The particular sociohistorical transformation—from premodernity to modernity—that I have traced through the novel’s metamorphic discourses of race, show, at least broadly, the mutual constructions of race, gender, and class that occur with that shift, and this reading situates Tess’s tragedy within the uneven developments that mark those redeployments and articulations of power. As Michael McKeon reminds us, the “modern principle of equality” associated with the rise of the middle-class and its “liberal ideology” certainly helped undermine a “system of customary entitlements” based on an aristocratic “assumption of inequality.” However, liberalism’s “regimes of sexual and racial differences . . . have never replaced in any absolute fashion the regime of hierarchy” (35).(23)

<53>To end with all these abstractions about race, gender, class, and politics is, however, to mime the same abstract intellectual operations that were, in fact, central to Tess’s destruction: Angel’s adherence to the “general principle” of female chastity “to the disregard of the particular instance” (333), to which Tess’s entire being testifies, is the most emphatic case in point. That is, such an abstract ending does not honor the particularized human being or experience whose value is affirmed by Hardy’s nuanced representations of Tess and whose loss Angel and Liza-Lu mourn on that awful hill outside Wintonchester. And so, rather than concluding with a figure of Tess “constructed” by intersecting sociopolitical discourses, a nexus of experience that concludes with the hangman’s knot, I’d rather invoke the image of that singular figure on a “thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning in May” (119) who, “in good heart and full of zest for life,” descends “towards the diary of her pilgrimage” (122). Perhaps this irreducible particularity and this momentary joy constitute that ambiguous “purity” to which Hardy alludes in his appended subtitle.

Endnotes

(1)All references to Tess are taken from the Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism edition of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, edited by John Paul Riquelme (Boston: Bedford, 1998.) Riquelme’s edition reprints the “1920 reimpression of the novel from the collected Wessex Edition of 1912, for which *Tess* was Volume One” (vii).(^)

(2)This allusion occurs during a painfully alienated walk after their mutual wedding-night confessions: Tess “knew that he saw her without irradiation—in all her bareness; that Time was chanting his satiric psalm at her then—”

Behold, when thy face is made bare, he that loved thee shall
Hate;

Thy face shall be no more fair at the fall of thy fate.
For thy life shall fall as a leaf and be shed as the rain;
And the veil of thine head shall be grief, and the crown shall be
Pain. (Hardy 235)(^)

(3)See, for example, Ann Laura Stoler's 1995 *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) and Jennifer DeVere Brody's 1998 *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998). Stoler highlights the crucial role female colonists played in maintaining the sexual and thus "racial" boundaries between various native and colonial populations, that is, their role in constructing "the private" sphere "and the management of the intimate in the making of imperial rule" (895). Brody looks at the ways in which literary and scientific constructions of the black, female body, artifacts of the Black Atlantic trade, were essential to domestic productions of "white" Victorian subjectivity.(^)

(4)To argue, as I will, that Hardy's Tess's tragedy is intelligible, at least in part, as a function of these changing racial signifiers requires at least two caveats. My claim might, at first, appear to belittle a tradition of scholarship that has exposed the fictiveness of race as a biological category while documenting its very real effects on individuals categorically unlike Tess. She is, to state the obvious, "white." To assert that her tragedy has a racialized component is not to assert that it is equivalent to the brutalization of Saartjie Bartmann or other Hottentot "Bushwoman," for example, who were figuratively and literally dissected in the name of nineteenth-century scientific "investigations" of racial differences. That is, while Tess's subjection represents the intersection of dominant class, gender, and racial ideologies, it is categorically not the same as Bartmann's and others like her. For a more extensive documentation of the Victorian obsession with the female, African body in which he discusses Bartmann, see, for example, Sander L. Gilman's "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature" in *Race, Writing, and Difference*. (Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), pp. 223-261. For a lucid analysis of the competing discourses of race in middle to late nineteenth-century Britain, see Douglas Lorimer's "Race, Science, and Culture: Historical Continuities and Discontinuities, 1850-1914" in *The Victorians and Race*. (Ed. Shearer West. Aldershot, Hants: Scolar P, 1996), pp. 12-33.

Second, as anyone who has ever lingered for long over historical pronouncements on race can attest, attempting to reconstruct the ideas of individual "theorists" or to trace a body of "racial" theory or folk beliefs over time is to confront a notoriously inconsistent, politically interested, and contradictory field. With the exception of that broad discursive shift from race understood in primarily lineal terms to its modern biologized form, I will not attempt to parse those tangled and contradictory constructions.(^)

(5)Norman Pages' "Hardy and Brazil" reviews the likely sources from which Hardy might have gained information about the experiences of British farm families in Brazil at the end of the century (*Notes and Queries*, New Series 30.4, 1983), pp. 319-320. For more information about the Brazilian management of emancipation, see also Klein, Herbert S. "European and Asian

Migration to Brazil.” *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*. Ed. Robin Cohen. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. 208-214.(^)

(6)Angel’s Brazilian emigration also functions as an assertion about the uncertainties of masculinity, a corollary to uncertainties about femininity. That is, his experience is directly counter to those represented in contemporaneous novels like R. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She*, which, according to Deidre David, “constitute English national and masculine subjectivity through tropes of travel, hazardous adventure, and eventual mastery of the forces that both threaten and define male power” (96). Obviously, Angel’s encounters on a foreign soil work to vastly different effect. For more on this topic, see David’s “Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel” in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. (Eds. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 84-100.(^)

(7)See Kate Lowe’s entry on “Renaissance Britain” in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford: Oxford Up, 2007: 401-404) for an overview of the domestic treatment of African and Arabian populations residing in early-modern Britain; while slavery was technically illegal in England, those taken from Africa and brought to England under duress were essentially enslaved, although others, like the sons of tribal leaders, came of their free will to study and were not similarly situated within British culture.

“Blackmoor,” of course, names a population whose presence in Britain has been documented since the Renaissance, “blackamore” and “negar” being the terms most commonly applied to that internal, largely darker-skinned population living in England as both free and illegally enslaved individuals centuries before emancipation (Lowe 402). (^)

(8)Blackmoor’s function as a site epistemological contention therefore calls into question claims by scholars like A.D. Mills, for example, who maintains that the Vale’s name derives from the Old English terms meaning “dark-coloured moor” presumably derived from an unmediated, apolitical, topographical reading of the Dorset countryside (*Dorset Place-Names: Their Origins and Meanings*. Wimborne, Dorset: Roy Gasson, 1988) p. 37.(^)

(9)Ragussis’s original remark does not suggest any racialized connotations. His remarks occur in the context of a psychologized reading of the novel, focusing on “the double names in *Tess*,” which do not “lead to the discovery of the one true name” that will, secure, once and for all, her identity. The original sentence is: “The status of Tess’s identity is reflected in the nature of the landscape that plays so prominent a part in her story” (141).(^)

(10)In fact, through the chronicle of Tess’s Norman ancestry and Angel’s brief discourse on English political history in Chapter 30, Hardy obliquely situates the novel in the company of some very popular, contemporaneous historical romances set in the early and later middle ages: Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe: a Romance*, Charles Kingsley’s *Hereward, Last of the English*, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last of the Barons*, for example, each depict the conflict between an Anglo-Saxon “race,” often imagined to embody a lost golden age of non-hierarchical government and weak kingship, and the “race” of Tess’s Norman ancestors, cast as alien occupiers who had, by virtue of conquest, erected a ruling edifice serving only their interests.

That is, each of these romances imaginatively reconstitutes the premodern era in which race-as-genealogy, to which the first and third invocations in *Tess* refer, initially operated as a conservative political trope, justifying aristocratic hegemony. (^)

(11) In this new nationalizing context, such invocations of “race” do represent an expansion of the genealogical model to more broadly “tribal” and cultural dimensions; it nonetheless remains consistent with classical and medieval notions “of understanding a nation . . . as a group of people linked by origin” (Hudson 248). Despite the contentious and divisive political claims invoked in the name of one’s “race” and the xenophobia that certainly existed, the object which “race” signified differed, as Hudson’s and Smedley’s exploration of its pre-modern usages suggest, from that constructed by subsequent discourses. “Classifying people into groups called ‘races’” did not become “inherently, a way of valuing and devaluing them” until early anthropologists and biologists transformed the “old, loose concept of race as a matter of heritage, language, and manners” into “a technical scientific category” (McWhorter 9).

Foucault further contends, not without controversy, that this is the historical moment in which “race” first gained salience as a political category in Europe, manifesting in what he calls a discourse of “race struggle or race war” (*Society* 99-111). See Stoler’s *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* for a reading that problematizes the largely but not exclusively insular, non-colonial focus of Foucault’s argument on the emergence of race as a salient political discourse in early-modern Europe. (^)

(12) Here the point of most import is not that Alex is actually a member of the *nouveau riche*, not a hereditary aristocrat, but that Tess’s family—the “true” but diminished aristocrats—seize upon the mercenary kinship ritual their ancestors would have deployed when they send Tess to Trantridge. Of course, their ignorance about how Alex’s family obtained the d’Urberville title deepens the tragic irony of this attempt to “claim kin.” (^)

(13) In the ranks of the working classes and the poor, as in Tess’s case, the connection between sex and economic viability often remained starkly visible, unobscured by the niceties of “romance.” The importance of denying the reality of the middle-class’s own sexual politics is suggested by the way in which middle-class professionals charged with analyzing and mitigating England’s social ills levied a psychological rather than political assessment against such “mercenary” sexual activities. Rather than acknowledge the failure of liberalism’s progressive agenda, Nancy Armstrong notes, “the working class” was represented “in terms of . . . personal deficiencies,” which allowed “middle-class intellectuals” to reframe “the overwhelming political problems caused by rapid industrialization” as “a sexual scandal brought about by the worker’s lack of personal development and self-restraint” (20). The “lack of personal development and self-restraint” alleged against this class, in general, echoes the specific accusatory terms—a “want of firmness” (Hardy 236)—which Angel subsequently levels against Tess for her perceived sexual transgression. (^)

(14) Foucault also identifies the crescendo of publications at the end of the eighteenth century, which focused on “bodily hygiene, the arts of longevity, and methods for improving human lineage,” as another discursive avenue by which the bourgeoisie formulated its claim for a

different “kind of body with a specific fitness for government,” against the aristocracy’s claims to its fitness for rule because of the purity of its blood (*History* 124-125).(^)

(15)Angel, for example, refers to her aristocratic lineage as “the grand card with which he meant to surprise” his family as the prime piece of evidence affirming Tess’s worthiness to be his wife (Hardy 216); his usage echoes Joan Durbeyfield’s earlier “trump card” metaphor: she invokes it, after preening Tess for her second journey to Trantridge, as a figure for her daughter’s comeliness, an advantage enhanced by the fact that Tess is “one of the genuine stock . . .” (Hardy 73). Other women are also related to or referred to as cards: there is Car Darch, “the Queen of Spades,” and “Nancy her sister, nicknamed the Queen of Diamonds” (Hardy 86-87); none of these are, however, associated with the middle-class, sentimental emblem of the heart.(^)

(16)Relocating aristocratic “blood” virtue in the maternal ideal and enshrining it within the romantic marriage plot also adds an additional facet to Foucault’s comprehensive, but genderless, description of the construction of the modern, bourgeois body. If, as he claims, “the aristocracy had . . . asserted the special character of its body . . . in the form of [its] blood,” looking to the past and to the legitimacy conferred by antiquity, then, in contrast, the bourgeoisie formulated its counterclaim for authority by asserting it in terms of a forward-looking body, emphasizing properties that would secure the future: it “looked to its progeny and the health of its organism when it laid claim to a specific body.” In short, bourgeois’ “blood,” its recognition that a different bodily assertion of virtue and political fitness was necessary to replace that asserted by the aristocracy, “was its sex” (Foucault, *History* 126). And in the new dispensation, the maternal ideal and her pre-maritally chaste antecedent were central to that project.(^)

(17)For a range of readings that treat Hardy’s relationship to Darwinian and neo-Darwinian theories, see Peter Morton’s “Neo-Darwinian Fate in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” in his *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860-1900* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp. 194-211. Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); and Roger Ebbatson’s *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Foster, Lawrence* (Brighton: Harvester; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1982).(^)

(18)In her *Women of the Fields: Representations of Rural Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), which explores the changing “myth of the rural woman” constructed within the century’s aesthetic and political discourses, Karen Sager documents how middle-class constructions of femininity prevailed even within Victorian feminists’ claims of solidarity with all English women. That is, arguments for the franchise and for fuller participation in the public sphere for all women were frequently asserted using “the language of sisterhood.” Despite assuming a “shared experience of all women as women . . . dominant definitions of race and class” remained intact (Sager 95). This resulted in questionable gains for non-dominant groups, like the female agricultural workers that Tess and her female cohorts represent.

For example, the “hard physical labor for wages” (Sager 175) field women performed contrasted with the nature of the professions to which middle-class feminists demanded access: teachers, nurses, or industrial inspectors all represented respectable extensions of the middle-class

domestic ideology of “caring” labor into the public arena (Sager 95). The “tanned or dirty skin, bare arms, and powerful limbs” of female field workers “also crossed the boundaries of race . . .” (Sager 178). As the bourgeois version of femininity was “universalized and as agriculture began to need fewer laborers,” legislation adopted in the name of “physical as well as moral fitness” further curtailed opportunities for female fieldwork (Sager 178). By century’s end, “women had largely passed from view as causal farm laborers” (Sager 137). For Sager’s intelligent analysis of *Tess*’s place in the construction the “myth of the rural woman,” see pp. 152-162.(^)

(19)In her essay, “Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender” (*The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Dale Kramer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 93-110, Kristen Brady tells us that “the technical language” of Hardy’s fiction often elicited comparisons “to the published discourse of Herbert Spencer, an important popularizer of social Darwinism and of essentialist ideas about gender difference” (95). Echoing the developmental logic of biology and anthropology, other contemporaries like Havelock Ellis conceptualized the “purity” of Hardy’s characters, especially his women, as that of the rural rustic, of the “instinctive” and amoral “primitive races” (96), precisely what this fourth invocation of “race” implies.(^)

(20)It may seem that I am absolving Alec of all responsibility for Tess’s tragedy here. While she is obviously unprepared for what transpires in *The Chase* and, thus, a victim of classed, gendered, and parental wrongs, that misalliance is a necessary but not sufficient action to spell her destruction. More than the earlier sexual liaison—whatever the “truth” of its nature—Angel’s inability to extend to Tess the forgiveness she had extended to him gives that misalliance its determinative force.(^)

(21)The myth concludes with the couple’s bodily transformation: depending upon which extant version of the myth one reads, Atalanta and Hippomenes are transformed into either birds or lions, when they forget or profane the gods to whom they owe their union. This motif of transformation certainly deserves more attention.(^)

(22)The “unnaturalness” of the golden apples in *Tess*’s mythical allusion also suggest that, like the romance ideology, they offer an alluring but insubstantial kind of sustenance, a thematic that certainly engaged Hardy: it lies at the heart of the novel following *Tess*, *Jude the Obscure*. As Terry Eagleton maintains, however, the title is misleading: the real “obscurity” in *Jude* is Sue Brideshead. She can only approach something like equality “in a refusal of sexuality—or at least [in] a refusal to concede the death-dealing dogma” of that ideology, which is that “love, sexuality and marriage must always coincide” (*The English Novel*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 211.(^)

(23)The Atalanta allusion certainly speaks to Hardy’s famous ambivalence about the strong female characters he creates. The psalter scene, where Tess sings and then stops, is just one instance in which Hardy’s sensitive characterization makes it clear, as Bernard Paris asserts, that Tess “is loved by the author because her feelings have for him and are made to have for the reader, an intense reality” (“‘A Confusion of Many Standards’: Conflicting Value Systems in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24.1, 1969), p. 76. Nevertheless, as the scene

also foreshadows, Tess is subsequently silenced by what Peter Widdowson calls Hardy's "repressive, neutralizing" narrative structure (*Hardy in History: A study in literary sociology*, London: Routledge, 1989), p. 217.

A letter to Walter Pater in 1888 also reveals Hardy's oscillation between this "repressive neutralizing" narrative structure and the "positive, liberating consciousness" suggested by the strong and appealing female characters (Widdowson 217), like Tess, that he depicts. Significantly, the letter employs Atalanta in one of its evaluations of a "handsome girl" with a "cruel small mouth" that Hardy meets; she is, he asserts, "an Amazon, more, an Atalanta, most, a Faustine," one of "the class of interesting women one would be afraid to marry" (qtd. in Widdowson 217). Widdowson argues that this allusion and the attraction/repulsion it depicts can best be understood in the general context of the class uncertainty that Hardy's Wessex novels evince, a situation with which Hardy was profoundly familiar. In that broader context he posits that "Hardy did indeed fear women, but in terms of their thoroughly upward social mobility," a threat intensified by his own class and professional insecurities. This "socio-sexual apprehension . . . becomes . . . the subject of his fiction and the object of its repression" (217).(^)

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