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Differences in Convention:
Serious vs. Comic in Turn-of-the-Century British Literature
(1885 – 1915)

by
Chris Mossing

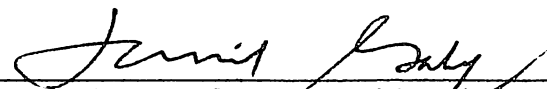
A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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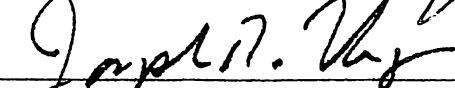
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ABSTRACT

CHRIS MOSSING: Differences between Serious and Comic British Fiction (1885-1915)
(Under the direction of Natalie Schroeder)

This thesis attempts to prove that the serious fiction of the late Victorian, the Edwardian, and early modernist eras of British literature differs fundamentally from the comic fiction of the same region and period in the way that it deals with chance. In serious works, authors do not allow acts of chance to dictate the responses of their characters, while the authors of comic works seem to be under no such restriction. To prove that this difference in convention exists, the thesis examines works from a handful of representative authors. For the serious, the thesis examines Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles, The Mayor of Casterbridge, and Jude the Obscure, W. Somerset Maugham's Liza of Lambeth and Of Human Bondage, and D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow. For the comic, the thesis examines Jerome K. Jerome's Three Men in a Boat and Tommy and Co. and P. G. Wodehouse's The White Feather, Psmith in the City, and My Man, Jeeves.

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Chapter I – Introduction

The thirty years around the turn of the twentieth century (1885 – 1915) are commonly called a “transitional period” in British literature (Rogal vii). Though various literary critics would prefer to extend the range of this period (Samuel Rogal believes the transition lasted from 1880 to 1920 [vii], while William C. Frierson suggests that this transition period extends from 1885 to 1940), few would try to narrow it. These thirty years are marked by the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the death of King Edward in 1910, and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Hence, the “sixty-four years [between 1837 and 1901] were universally called Victorian after the Queen who typified the taste of those years” (Hunter 3), the “generation of writers who published their work between 1901 and 1910 . . . saw nothing artificial with the name “Edwardian” (3), and literary critics generally agree that literature after 1914 falls under the heading of “post-war modernism.”

The sheer magnitude of the changes taking place in this thirty-year span (the transition of British literature from Victorian to Edwardian and finally to modernist) might lead some to argue that this cannot be properly considered a single period at all. These people would be incorrect-though works of the three periods are considerably different, they are not so different that they share no common ground. Throughout the span of this “transitional period,” British literature holds many literary techniques and philosophies in common.

One convention common to the serious literature of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Britain is that acts of chance do not dictate plot developments. In literature, as in life, actions have consequences. Chance acts to divorce an action from its natural consequence, which poses a particular problem for the serious literature of Victorian and post-Victorian Britain. The Victorian concept of humanity is heavily invested in concepts of free will and responsibility. In the words of John R. Reed, the author of Victorian Will, “if a man is free, he is responsible . . . Even if gods or fates deal unjustly with him, he has a chance to respond in some way and to assert his identifying humanity, perhaps only in the form of rebellious resistance, but in some measurable action” (5). To make choices is to assert one’s humanity, and to be free to make choices is to be responsible for them. So if chance dictates the plot developments in the serious literature of the British transitional period, it divorces action from consequence, limiting the characters’ free will and making them less responsible for their actions. In effect, chance makes the characters less believable. Say that a man has a family history of heart disease, and that he acts to increase his life expectancy by exercising fanatically. If he gets involved in a three car pile-up on the freeway and dies at thirty-five, what use was his exercise regimen?

Conversely, acts of chance do not prove difficult for the comic literature of this period. Readers of comedy expect that consequences be somewhat divorced from actions, not that they don’t have consequences but that they have unexpected consequences. Moreover, comic literature generally deals with lighter subject matter than serious literature. Thus, the limits that chance places on the free will of characters in comic literature are both less noticeable and less objectionable.

It is this fundamental difference between the serious and comic genres of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century British literature that I intend to cover in my thesis. Furthermore, as the subject of discussion is so broad, it is my intention to limit it to a representative number of the major works of five prominent authors of the period: three serious writers, Thomas Hardy, W. Somerset Maugham, and D. H. Lawrence, and two comic writers, Jerome K. Jerome and P.G. Wodehouse. Of the serious works, I will be examining Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles, The Mayor of Casterbridge, and Jude the Obscure, Maugham's Liza of Lambeth and Of Human Bondage, Lawrences's Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow; of the "light" works, I will cover Jerome's Three Men in a Boat and Tommy and Co. and Wodehouse's The White Feather, Psmith in the City, and My Man, Jeeves.

Chance does not dictate the behavior of characters in serious literature. However, several varieties of chance do occur which do not dictate characters' responses. The first variety of acceptable chance is that chance which the authors have made an underlying part of their novels' universes. Every story needs a starting point. The character of Tom Jones could have been named Charles Smith or John Miller. Instead of a foundling, he could have been the legitimate son of a noble family. Some aspects of a story should be viewed simply as fundamental assumptions. For the purposes of this thesis, I will call this variety underlying chance. Another variety of acceptable chance is that chance which the authors include as staging or to convey a symbolic meaning. It does not significantly affect the plot of the story, and thus cannot dictate a character's responses. For the purposes of this thesis, I will call this variety incidental chance.

Furthermore, as “chance” is a somewhat anomalous term, the thesis could benefit from a working definition. For the purposes of this study, the definition of an act motivated only by chance, i.e. a random occurrence or an accident, is an act that is performed without precedent. For the act of a character to be random, it must not be motivated by the character’s beliefs or past actions. Likewise, for a change in a character’s environment to be random, it must be outside the ordinary for the environment. To provide examples from the texts under discussion, it is a random act when Mrs. Morel, the thrifty wife of a poor coal-miner, purchases a piece of crockery only because she is attracted to its pattern of cornflowers (Sons 76, 77), but not a random act when Philip, a young man dreadfully afflicted by wanderlust, goes to Germany (Bondage 77). It is a random act when a maddened bull escapes from its enclosure and menaces Elizabeth and Lucetta (Mayor 200-202), but not when Mr. Durbeyfield, a man with a “heart clogged like a dripping-pan” (Tess 69) dies of a heart attack (291).

Chapter II – Thomas Hardy

One of the methods Thomas Hardy uses to show that the decisions of his characters are unaffected by chance is to introduce exotic scenarios into his novels that do not affect the development of his characters. In his “Study of Thomas Hardy,” Lawrence writes:

It is urged against Hardy’s characters that they do unreasonable things . . . They are always going off unexpectedly and doing something that nobody would do. That is quite true, and the charge is amusing . . . They are people each with a real, vital, potential self, even the apparently wishy-washy heroines of the earlier books, and this self suddenly bursts the shell of manner and convention and commonplace opinion and acts independently. (20)

Lawrence must be taken with a grain of salt, because his “Study” is less about Thomas Hardy than it is about his reaction to Hardy, and what he would have done with Hardy’s characters if he had written them. However, his observation is good—even when Hardy’s characters act peculiarly or are in strange situations, they still act in accordance with their “real, vital, potential sel[ves].” By having his characters act naturally (i.e. according to their natures) in the midst of unlikely situations, Hardy reinforces the idea that they have free will. To quote George Levine, Hardy “argues for the risk of incredibility in plot in order to insure credibility in character” (175).

This is not to say that Hardy's novels consist mostly of incredible coincidences through which his stalwart characters march unaffected. Taken in their entirety, only small pieces of his novels feature such occurrences. Critics give these occasions a disproportional amount of coverage because of the drama of the spectacles (among them, the maddened bull in Mayor, the birth of Sorrow in Tess, Father Time's murder-suicide in Jude) and their symbolic value to the stories. As the prominent Hardy critic Dale Kramer says, "the key word in Hardy's comment on form in fiction would seem to be *organic*. Everything affecting the plot and characters must be natural to the conditions in the novel and must grow out of these conditions" (11).

The Mayor of Casterbridge, published in 1886, is a good example of a story in which no event that occurs without precedent has an effect upon the development of the plot. It is the story of Michael Henchard, a proud and ambitious farmer-his rise and subsequent fall in station, and the complications that ensue from his decision to sell his wife and daughter at a county fair.

Though Henchard's sale of his wife and daughter seems to be the product of a random impulse, it is the natural consequence of several clearly defined factors. At the beginning, Henchard makes it clear that he blames his current misfortune on the "ruin of [a] good [man] by [a] bad [wife], and, more particularly, the frustration of . . . a promising youth's high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies by an early imprudent marriage" (6). He also views his fortune as reversible; he declares that "I'd challenge England to beat me in the fodder business; and if I were a free man again I'd be worth a thousand pound before I'd done o't" (6). This opinion explains Henchard's desire to divest himself of the "burden" of his wife, Susan, and child. Susan has an

equally compelling reason to part ways: Henchard is “overbearing—even brilliantly quarrelsome” (6). She has been listening to his complaints for several years and has built up a considerable resentment towards him, so much so that when Henchard sells them to Newson, a passing sailor, Susan rejoices, saying “I’ve lived with thee a couple of years, and had nothing but temper! Now I’m no more to ‘ee; I’ll try my luck elsewhere. ‘Twill be better for me and Elizabeth-Jane both. So good-bye!” (10). Given such a vested desire in both parties to separate, it is not surprising that the couple would choose to do so.

It is true that Henchard’s drunken state plays a role in this decision. However, his drunkenness here is not a singular event. His wife recognizes he has a problem with alcohol. When they arrive at the county fair Susan “strenuously steer[s] [him] off the rocks of the licensed liquor-tent” (5). Moreover, this is not the first time that Henchard has tried to sell her. Right before Newson makes an offer, Susan tells Michael Henchard that “you have talked this nonsense in public places before. A joke is a joke, but you may make it once too often,” to which he replies “I know I’ve said it before; I meant it. All I want is a buyer” (7). Thus, Henchard’s sale of his wife is not without precedent in the novel.

The outward form of this separation, the sale, is quite dramatic, but it is less material to the plot of the novel than is the separation itself. The proceeds of the sale do not set into motion Henchard’s subsequent rise in station; they are quite paltry. Rather, Henchard becomes the mayor of Casterbridge through the application of his now-undiminished “energies.” It may be that Henchard correctly diagnoses the impediment to his initial success as the burden of caring for a wife and child. Alternatively, his rise in

station may be result of his vow to abstain from strong drink. Regardless of what factor starts Henchard on his upward climb, his rise is inspired by his character, not chance. Michael Henchard is no Horatio Alger protagonist to have fortune dropped in his lap. For example, in Cast Upon the Breakers, published in 1893, Alger's protagonist Rodney Ropes hides from kidnappers in an abandoned mine and subsequently discovers gold. Henchard, in contrast, works for his success.

Chance, however, is responsible for the introduction of Donald Farfrae to the story. When he arrives in Casterbridge, a blight is affecting Henchard's wheat. Farfrae suggests a remedy to Henchard and is rewarded with an offer of employment. This is a chance meeting, and it does have a meaningful effect on the plot. Farfrae does such a good job at managing Henchard's operation that eventually his reputation begins to overshadow Henchard's own, which irritates Henchard enough that he fires him. Farfrae responds by starting up a competing firm, which comes to drive Henchard out of business.

Farfrae's appearance in Casterbridge is an example of meaningful chance. Because he appears after Henchard has sold Susan at the county fair, his introduction to the story does not qualify as underlying chance, and because Farfrae is a main character of Mayor, his introduction cannot be an example of incidental chance. However, Farfrae's appearance does not dictate Henchard's future behavior. Michael Henchard can be thought of as a tragic hero; his tragic flaw is pride. When Henchard's pride drives him to fire Farfrae, he creates a rival who did not exist before. Thus, it is not Farfrae's appearance (chance) but Henchard's response to this appearance (character) that sets into motion his eventual downfall.

Though chance is responsible for Farfrae's introduction to the novel, it plays no part in the events to come. Henchard originally hires Farfrae because, in his own words, "strength and bustle build up a firm. But judgment and knowledge are what keep it established. Unluckily, I am bad at science, Farfrae; bad at figures—a rule o' thumb sort of man. You are just the reverse" (45, 46). When bad weather endangers their crops of grain, Henchard makes impulsive decisions and loses his, while Farfrae uses his superior "judgment and knowledge" to prosper. If the town elevated Henchard to the office of Mayor on the basis of his success in the wheat business, it is not unusual that a similar success on Farfrae's part would elevate his social status.

The next noteworthy aspect of The Mayor of Casterbridge is the competition between Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae for the hand of Lucetta Templeman. Henchard first met Lucetta when he fell ill on a business trip and "was taken pity on by a woman . . . [who] got to have a foolish liking for [him]" (74, 75). They became intimate, and Lucetta developed a strong attraction for him and extracted from him a promise to marry. When Susan resurfaces, Henchard calls the engagement off. He hears nothing from her until Susan dies, after which Lucetta responds by moving to Casterbridge. Though Lucetta "no longer bore towards Henchard all that warm allegiance which had characterized her in their first acquaintance . . . there remained a conscientious wish to bring about her union with him, now that there was nothing to hinder it—to right her position" (150, 151). At first, she believes that the only way to "right her position" is to marry Henchard, but then she meets Farfrae and comes to resent Henchard for not immediately coming to see her. The competition between the two men comes to an end

when Henchard saves Lucetta from a rampaging bull only to learn that she has already married Farfrae.

The competition is noteworthy because it contains many situations that appear quite random: Susan's return and her subsequent death; Lucetta's replacement of Henchard with Farfrae; and Lucetta's encounter with the rampaging bull. Of these three apparent anomalies, the first and third are immaterial, and the second is readily explainable. As unlikely as it seems, Susan's reappearance has only a limited effect on the story.

Three areas of Henchard's life are important to the plot of Mayor: his professional life (i.e. his business as a grain factor); his social life (his relationship with Lucetta); and his mental outlook. Neither his professional life nor his mental outlook are affected by Susan's reappearance, and while it is true that Henchard feels a moral obligation to take care of his wife, by no means is Susan the reason he and Lucetta don't wed. Susan Henchard dies soon after she reappears in Henchard's life. Were it not for other natural factors, Susan's reappearance would only have delayed the marriage between the two. Henchard does not truly want to marry Lucetta; he proposes to her only because "she suffered much on [his] account, and didn't forget to tell [him] so in letters one after another; till, latterly, [he] felt [he] owed her something" (75). After Susan's death, when Henchard is free to wed, he hesitates even to pay Lucetta a visit. His pursuit of her comes only after he observes Farfrae's interest. Also immaterial is Henchard's impassioned rescue of Lucetta from the maddened bull. Though it makes for excellent drama, it does not seriously affect the plot. Henchard could have just as easily learned of her marriage in a more mundane fashion.

Finally, the romance between Lucetta and Farfrae is not random but the natural consequence of their two characters. The sudden intimacy between Lucetta and Henchard at their first meeting makes it clear that she has a passionate nature. It is also clear that Lucetta was quite taken with Farfrae at their first meeting, describing him as “years younger than the Mayor of Casterbridge; fair, fresh, and slenderly handsome” (154). In their first conversation, she alternately blushes, pouts, and giggles; she “had enkindled the young man’s enthusiasm till he was quite brimming with sentiment” (160). After some thought, she decides that “she was forced into an equivocal position with the first man [Henchard] by an accident—that he was not so well educated or refined as the second [Farfrae], and that she had discovered some qualities in the first that rendered him less desirable as a husband than she had at first thought him to be” (168,169). Their relationship does not seem like a quirk of fate, but like a natural decision they made jointly.

Though neither the sudden reappearance of Susan Henchard nor the dramatic interlude with the bull affect the plot development of The Mayor of Casterbridge, that is not to say that they aren’t worthy of comment. These events are quite important to the story—at the very least, they serve as dramatic staging, and have symbolic value as well. Furthermore, events like this are not confined to Mayor alone; they appear in all three of the Hardy novels covered in this thesis. However, they do lie outside its purview. The task of this thesis is to establish that random events do not affect the plot development of serious novels in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Britain; though the phenomenon of dramatic staging in Hardy novels may be interesting, it is not material to the discussion taking place.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, published in 1891, is the story of Tess Durbeyfield, an innocent country girl, and her relationship with two men: Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare.

Though Tess was born to poverty, the Durbeyfields used to be nobility. According to Parson Tringham, the local antiquary, the Durbeyfields are “the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan d'Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror” (5). Though this discovery might seem a stroke of luck, this is in fact merely a part of the novel's universe. The parson first told John Durbeyfield his family's noble history a month before the novel opens, making this fact as much a part of the setting of the story as the size of the Durbeyfield family (nine, including Tess) or the name of the village they live in (Marlott). The Durbeyfields' awareness of their historical nobility is an example of underlying chance. Another instance of underlying chance in Tess is the name that the families of Tess and Alec share, d'Urberville. Though they have a last name in common, Alec and Tess are not in the least related—Alec's family used to be named Stoke until his father, seeking a name which “would not too readily identify him with the smart tradesman of the past,” randomly chose d'Urberville from a list of “extinct, half-extinct, obscured, and ruined families” in the British museum (32). Alec's father changed his family name before the action of the novel begins, possibly before Tess is even born. Thus, the fact that the Stokes and the Durbeyfields have the same last name is an example of underlying chance.

One incident that is certainly not underlying chance is the death of the Durbeyfield family horse, Prince. While making a delivery, Tess falls asleep at the reins

and collides with the “morning mail-cart . . . [causing] the pointed shaft of the cart [to enter] the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword” (26). This accident is seemingly responsible for the Durbeyfields’ decision to send Tess to their supposed relatives. However, her mother had already started to make plans for her to go even before the accident – days earlier her mother had declared that her “projick is to send Tess to claim kin [with] a great rich lady out by Trantridge, on the edge o’ The Chase, of the name of d’Urberville . . . [who] must be our relation” (21). Furthermore, sending Tess off to rich relatives is not the Durbeyfields only option. Tess goes because she is an obedient daughter and her mother wants her to. Thus, Tess would have been sent to the Stoke-d’Urbervilles whether or not her family’s horse died; its death is merely dramatic staging, like Henchard and the bull.

Although Tess feels guilt at killing Prince, this guilt is not responsible for her going to the Stoke-d’Urbervilles. Because she “killed the old horse . . . [she] supposes [that she] ought to do something . . . to help get enough money for a new horse” (39–41). Her guilt is why she volunteers to work on a neighboring farm, certainly. Nonetheless, it is not responsible for her departure. Before Prince’s death, her mother had already made up her mind that she will send Tess to “claim kin,” and that Tess “won’t say nay to going” (22). Joan anticipates resistance from Tess, but is confident she can overcome it. Tess “is tractable at bottom,” says Joan Durbeyfield, “Leave her to me.” (22). I will concede that Prince’s death provides Joan with another handle with which to coerce Tess into obedience, but with or without this additional handle, Joan is confident of success.

At the Stoke-d’Urbervilles, Tess meets Alec, a young man with “most culpable passions” (140). Alec is attracted to a “luxuriance of aspect, a fulness of growth, which

made [Tess] appear more of a woman than she really was" (34). When he matches his wiles against Tess's youth and inexperience, her seduction is the natural consequence. Nine months later, Tess gives birth to a sickly child, whom she names Sorrow. It dies the day after she gave birth. Though Sorrow's birth and death may seem momentous, they are in fact immaterial to the plot. Sorrow is mentioned only in the two pages of the book that chronicle his birth and death, and no more afterwards. Sorrow is another example of Hardy's dramatic staging; he symbolizes the fact that Tess is now a fallen woman.

When Tess repents of her submission to Alec, she leaves his estate and seeks work elsewhere. She finds work, and Angel Clare, at a "dairy-house many miles to the southward" (84). It is a slight coincidence that she runs into him; though he is "going the round of some other farms, his object being to acquire a practical skill in the various processes of farming" (96), there is no particular reason for the two to be at the same farm at the same time. Like Farfrae's introduction to Mayor, Hardy allows a small degree of chance into his plot in order to introduce a major character mid-novel. The more important factor, the relationship between the two, is by no means an accident. Angel is attracted to her innocence and her insight, while Tess is attracted to him because he is educated, reserved, and thoughtful. From this mutual attraction, their relationship grows to a point where they "unconsciously studied each other, ever balanced on the edge of a passion, yet apparently keeping out of it. All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale . . . They met continually; they could not help it" (109). Eventually, Tess and Angel marry.

But all the while they are courting, Tess feels guilt at having submitted to Alec, and this guilt drives her to make a confession to Angel. A week before the wedding, she

writes him a letter and slips it under the door, only to later find that it slipped under the rug and went unread. Though Tess makes a second confession in person, she does so only after they are already married. Angel feels implacably betrayed: “within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it” (202). Thus, this misplaced letter seems to be an accident with a meaningful effect on the plot. However, Tess delivers the letter on Christmas Eve, and the two are married on New Year’s Day. Upon giving Angel the letter and receiving no response, Tess has a full week to make sure that he knows. During this week she suspects that he has not received her letter, a suspicion that is confirmed the morning before their wedding. Though she “jumped at [the incident of the misplaced letter] as if it prevented a confession . . . she knew in her conscience that it need not; there was still time” (178). Tess’s delay in telling Angel of her submission to Alec until after the wedding is not caused by the accident of the misplaced letter; she chooses not to tell him beforehand, not in the week before the wedding where she doubts that he knows and not in the hours before the wedding where she knows that he does not.

Angel’s sense of betrayal causes him to desert Tess, and she returns to her family for solace. In her absence, they have continued to fall in station. John Durbeyfield has “been obliged to sell his second horse” (215), the one that Tess acquired for him, and both parents are in ill-health. Tess takes it upon herself to support the family, and her savings erode away. When Alec d’Urberville reappears in Tess’s life, he plays upon her fears and her sense of obligation to her family until she agrees to return to him. Again

Alec has used the disparity in station and experience between him and Tess to get what he wants from her.

It is important to note that Angel never intends to permanently desert Tess—when he leaves, he tells her, “There is no anger between us, though there is that which I cannot endure at present. I will bring myself to try to endure it . . . And if I can bring myself to bear it—if it is desirable, possible—I will come to you” (212). So Angel’s return later in the novel is in no way an accident. Neither is it a random act when Tess kills Alec; she is motivated by the strength of her love for Angel, the profound sense of guilt she feels for betraying him, and the rage she feels for Alec for making her betray him. Afterwards, Tess tells Angel that ever since she first “struck [Alec] on the mouth with [her] glove,” she has feared that “[she] might [kill him] some day for the trap he set for [her] in [her] simple youth, and his wrong to [Angel] through [Tess]” (318). Finally, given her murder of Alec, it is not surprising that she is arrested for the crime and sentenced to death. Though death by execution may seem an extraordinary end for Tess, it is nonetheless a natural conclusion to those steps leading up to it.

In “Finding a Scale for the Human,” Gillian Beer suggests that the deaths of all protagonists in Hardy’s novels are in some way natural, regardless of in what circumstances the deaths should occur. She writes that “whereas [other novels] tend to include death, rather than end with death, Hardy’s texts pay homage to the human scale by ceasing as the hero or heroine dies” (56). Death in Hardy’s novels is not a major theme but simply a natural mechanism for bringing them to a close—the stories end when the protagonists die.

The last novel that Thomas Hardy wrote is Jude the Obscure, published in 1895. It is primarily the story of two cousins, Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead, and their desperately unhappy marriages to other people, Arabella Donn and Richard Phillotson, and their only potentially happy marriage to each other. Through these characters, Hardy also focuses his novel on intangibles: through the two unhappy marriages, he gives a negative view of marriage as an institution, and through the thwarting of Jude's desire for a higher education, Hardy criticizes the elitism of that institution in England.

Though Arabella is obviously unsuited for Jude, and Mr. Phillotson is obviously unsuited for Sue, their marriages are in no way accidental. A definite chain of concrete events, all in keeping with the nature of the two characters, causes them to occur. Jude's initial attraction to Arabella is biological—it stems only from the fact that “she was a complete and substantial female animal” (43). What causes the relationship to progress is the intensity of Arabella's desire for Jude, which is essentially a desire to improve her station in life. At one point, Arabella describes the main benefit of their marriage as her acquisition of “a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit” (62). Jude only gets married because Arabella entraps him by seducing him and then falsely claiming she is pregnant. To put the situation figuratively, and using Hardy's own words, Jude is entrapped by “the unvoiced call of woman to man, which was uttered very distinctly by Arabella's personality [and] held Jude to the spot against his intention—almost against his will, and in a way new to his experience” (44). Jude marries Arabella because she matches her wiles against his ideals and inexperience.

A similar situation drives Sue to marry Mr. Phillotson. Sue decides to go into the teaching field because it offers a greater income and greater freedom than the other job options available to her (106). When she starts teaching in Mr. Phillotson's school, she becomes a younger, less experienced woman in a materially subordinate position to an older man. Though Phillotson felt "he was old enough to be the girl's father" (108), he notices in the first week Sue works for him "a new emanation, which had nothing to do with her skill as a teacher" (108) and takes to "watch[ing] her as a curiosity" (108). His attraction for her increases to the point where Phillotson himself admits that he "took advantage of her inexperience, and [took] her out for walks, and got her to agree to a long engagement before she well knew her own mind" (227). The unhappiness of the two separate marriages of Jude and Sue is not a random twist of fate, but the natural conclusion of the pair's youth and inexperience and the binding nature of marriage, one of Hardy's themes for the novel.

Jude and Sue's decision to marry is also not inspired by chance. From his childhood, Jude had grown up hearing about how he and his cousin Sue were "just the same" (17). Before even meeting her, he conceives of her as an ideal woman, or an angel; the first time he sees a picture of her, he compares the hat she is wearing to "the rays of a halo" (80). And after meeting her, "she remained more or less an ideal character" (91), but one about whom he "began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams" (92). The attraction on Jude's part is obvious. On Sue's part, the attraction lies in Jude's ardent devotion. When she writes him that she is "quite lonely and miserable [at her teacher's college]" (131), Jude responds by "[coming there] to live, entirely to be near her" (142). Moreover, Sue had long desired a willing audience with whom to

discuss her personal religion and philosophies (in her words, to “ennoble some man to high aims” [153]), and she saw Jude as a likely candidate. After some time, both Jude and Sue obtain divorces from their spouses and marry each other.

Though Jude and Sue’s marriage had the potential to be happy, the reality of their marriage was not. The event that seems to destroy the marriage between Jude and Sue is the murder-suicide carried out by their eldest son, the product of his earlier marriage to Arabella. However, the marriage was doomed to failure long before that. Even before Arabella’s interference, Sue had a nagging doubt that, because her old marriage was miserable, the institution of marriage was bad luck for her. Suspecting this fact from a conversation she has with Sue, Arabella begins a campaign to dissolve the marriage by playing upon these bad feelings. Unlike Father Time’s murder-suicide, Arabella’s interference is far from a singular event—from her earlier conduct in entrapping Jude, it is clear that Arabella has both the talent and proclivity for manipulation. She takes pains to meet Sue as often as possible, at every opportunity suggesting to her that she belongs to Mr. Phillotson and that Jude belongs to Arabella. Far from being the surprising effect of a singular event (the boy’s murder-suicide) the dissolution of Jude and Sue’s marriage is the result of a natural and previously observed trend—Arabella’s manipulation of people to get what she wants.

Another event that seems both unlikely and momentous is a meeting between Arabella and Mr. Phillotson, in which she informs him that the couple has separated and lets him know where to find them. The meeting is actually neither unlikely nor momentous. Hardy takes pains to explain that both people have a natural reason to be in the same place: Arabella lives in the village where they meet, and Mr. Phillotson visits

there every market day. In an editorial comment, Hardy says explicitly that their meeting “was not wonderful” (350), wonderful in the sense of unusual or surprising. The meeting is a chance event only in the sense that a flipped coin landing on heads is a chance event: it won’t happen every time, but it’s bound to happen sooner or later. Furthermore, the meeting is not responsible for Jude and Sue returning to their original spouses. It is true that the meeting inspires in Mr. Phillotson a desire to see Sue, but Arabella’s manipulations had already inspired Sue to seek him out. Sue would have reunited with him eventually; she has already decided that she “[belongs] to him—[she] sacramentally joined [herself] to him for life. Nothing can alter it!” (345). As for Jude and Arabella reuniting, this meeting plays no part. Arabella meets Jude in a bar, gets him drunk, then drags him to her home and keeps him there insensible while she makes the plans for their second marriage. None of these machinations are foreign to Arabella’s nature, and none of them require that she had met Mr. Phillotson.

Though the murder-suicide of Jude’s eldest son, and the chance meeting between Arabella and Mr. Phillotson may seem to be quite important to the plot of Jude the Obscure, they are in fact only instances of Hardy’s dramatic staging, like Michael Henchard’s rescue of Lucetta from a maddened bull.

Though Gillian Beer made a good point about the scale of the human in Hardy’s novels, I do not agree with her conclusion that “plot in Hardy . . . involves the overthrow of the individual . . . by the machinations (or disregard) of ‘crass casualty’” (56). Plot in Hardy involves characters making decisions, some of them good and some of them bad, but all of them in accordance with their nature. In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Michael Henchard’s pride and ambition cause his initial rise and later fall in fortune; in Tess of the

d'Urbervilles, Tess's poverty and inexperience allow Alec to repeatedly take advantage of her until she finally kills him; in Jude the Obscure, the inexperience of Jude and Sue leads them into disastrous first marriages from which they could not truly escape. In none of these stories are the characters forced by random chance into an action contrary to their natures, though acts of random chance do frequently occur. Characters in Hardy are responsible for their own actions.

Chapter III – W. Somerset Maugham

Jude the Obscure, published in 1895, was the last novel that Thomas Hardy wrote. Liza of Lambeth, published in 1897, was W. Somerset Maugham's first. Though their works are roughly contemporaneous, the two authors are quite different. Maugham's novels have a simplicity that Hardy's lack, as evidenced by the fact that the elaborate scenarios that Hardy introduces into his novels as dramatic staging are conspicuously absent in Maugham. Whether Hardy or Maugham is more realistic is a subject for debate. While people are more likely to encounter Maugham's simplicity in their day-to-day lives, certainly the dramatic events that Hardy portrays do occur once or twice in a lifetime.

Maugham receives less critical attention than do Hardy and Lawrence. In fact, this disregard persists even in books about the man and his works. For instance, Samuel Rogal, the author of A William Somerset Maugham Encyclopedia, is peculiarly ready to concede that "Maugham may not be deserving of a position within the highest ranks of English literature" (vii), damning him with the faint praise that "[his] literary record . . . as writer requires no one to rise to its defense" (vii). Similarly, M. K. Naik claims

At the heart of the literary career of Somerset Maugham lies a baffling enigma: here was a writer equipped at most points—a born storyteller, a shrewd observer of men and manners, and an able technician; blessed with a long and not uneventful life enriched by wide travel and experience; the author of about one

hundred literary contributions which have won popular acclaim—and yet what did he leave, ultimately, by way of lasting creative achievement? Nothing except a ‘slender baggage,’ as he himself admitted with his characteristically ruthless honesty—‘two or three plays and a dozen short stories,’ to which may be added a couple of novels for fair measure. How did this happen? (3)

According to Naik’s bibliography, W. Somerset Maugham has published no fewer than nineteen novels, twenty-four plays, and nine separate and distinct short story collections. His literary career runs from 1897 to 1948, and includes both serious and comedic literary works. Though he was a versatile and prolific writer, critical responses to his work have been few and far between. The primary exceptions to this rule are Of Human Bondage, a serious novel published in 1915, and Cakes and Ale, a comic novel which unfortunately lies far outside the time frame of this thesis (published in 1930).

W. Somerset Maugham’s serious novels deny random chance the opportunity to affect the plot by not allowing it to occur within the development of the story. His first novel, Liza of Lambeth, follows Liza, an innocent young girl who is taken advantage of by an unprincipled man. Nowhere in the proceedings does chance take any hand.

There are only three main characters in Liza of Lambeth, Liza and her two romantic interests, Tom and Blakeston, none of whom change throughout the course of the novel, which M. K. Naik believes “reads less like a novel than a transcript from slum life” (30). Liza herself is young and vain. When she dances in the street, she “threw her whole soul into it . . . [and] gave herself up entirely to the present pleasure” (17). Tom is a suitor her age, “a young man . . . almost boyish . . . [who] had a frank and pleasant look

mingled with a curious bashfulness that made him blush when people spoke to him" (25), while Jim Blakeston is a large, aggressive man twenty years her senior.

Though Tom frequently confesses his love for Liza, she is not attracted to him. She prefers instead the "burly person of Jim Blakeston . . . [with his] heavy form and big, rough hand" (84). Though Blakeston is married, Liza kisses him in the street, goes out with him to a picnic, and eventually begins a full-fledged affair. As a result of their affair, Liza becomes pregnant and earns the enmity of Blakeston's wife. In a run-in on the street, Mrs. Blakeston physically attacks Liza, causing her to miscarry and die as a result of it.

At first glance, two of the decisive events in Liza's chronology seem to be the results of chance. The first of these is her choice of a man, which does not appear to be a foregone conclusion. Tom and Blakeston each have their own merits; while Tom offers security, Blakeston offers adventure, and it is not certain which virtue Liza ultimately prefers. The second decisive event is the manner of her death. Liza, a twenty-year-old girl, dies from a miscarriage brought on by a street brawl. To modern eyes, both the fight and the death appear unlikely. However, a meticulous reading of Liza of Lambeth identifies the clues in the story which make these two episodes the natural conclusions of the events which come before them.

Liza is young and excitable. Such a character is more likely to make impulsive decisions than engage in a calm and calculated process of weighing her options. On the one hand, Tom offers stability. When he proposes to her, he highlights the facts that he's "earnin' twenty-three shillin's at the works now, an [he's] got some furniture as mother left [him] when she was took . . . an' yer know [he's] not a drinkin' sort" (27). On the

other hand, Jim Blakeston offers Liza a hint of adventure. Her first meeting with Blakeston is in the middle of the street, after she had been dancing to the tune of an itinerant musician. Her first sight of him is of a “big, bearded man whom she had never seen before” (20) scooping her up into his arms and “imprint[ing] two sounding kisses on her cheeks” (20). Tom is familiar; Blakeston is exciting and new. Tom is diffident; Blakeston, as we have just seen, is quite forward. Liza’s choice is a natural one for an immature young woman. She chooses adventure over comfort, the novel over the familiar.

Now we come to the cause of Liza’s death. Once Liza chooses Blakeston, her affair with him is unsurprising, as is her eventual pregnancy. But what of the fight on the streets? Is this a natural occurrence? Given the setting of the novel, it is. Lambeth, the area in which the story is set, is a poor and violent neighborhood. Residents of Lambeth are so inured to violence that they view “murder in a neighboring doss-house” more as an interesting topic of conversation than as something to be alarmed over (9). Physical violence is an inextricable part of their daily lives, especially women. Except for spinsters and crones, every woman who appears in this novel has been beaten at least once, including Liza, who is beaten both by Blakeston and his wife. Hence, it is unsurprising that Mrs. Blakeston should react violently to learning of Liza’s affair with her husband. It is also unsurprising that after the fight, Liza miscarries and dies as a result of it. Childbirth in Lambeth is dangerous enough even for women who haven’t just been savagely beaten. The midwife who comes to see Liza notes that she is her second woman patient to die in ten days and goes on to imply that infant mortality is so high that she has never bothered to include them in her count.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Maugham does not allow chance to affect the development of Liza of Lambeth—after all, it's quite a simple and straightforward story. For chance to affect significant change in a novel, it is first necessary for change to occur in the novel. Only a limited number of changes occur in the course of Liza. The setting of the story does not change, and the characters, though realistic, are for the most part static. All three principals leave the book with the exact same opinions with which they start it. The rigidity of cause and effect found in W. Somerset Maugham's Liza of Lambeth is similar to the mechanical motion of a clock winding down—he introduces all the important elements at the beginning, then sits back and allows them to reach their natural conclusion.

In Maugham's later novel, Of Human Bondage, which focuses on the personal development of its protagonist, Philip Carey, he uses two different methods to deny chance the opportunity to affect the plot. First, Maugham takes care to present all “unprecedented” effects (those facts of the story that might strike a reader as unusual) in the exposition. In this way, he makes these “novelties” part of Bondage's underlying universe. Then, he makes the protagonist a fairly static character, who only undergoes significant changes in the beginning and the ending of the novel. By limiting the number of meaningful changes that occur in the story, Maugham limits the number of developments for which he has to account. As the overwhelming majority of the book is inconsequential, the opportunities for chance to affect the plot are quite limited.

When we are introduced to Philip Carey as a child, his character is already mostly formed. His upbringing as an only child has made him “used to amusing himself” (10), and his handicap, a club-foot, exacerbates this distance between him and other people.

His mother and father have just died, leaving him in the care of his uncle, William Carey, a dour Victorian clergyman, who “on the way to [visit his dying sister-in-law] thought of nothing but the disturbance in his life that would be caused if her death forced him to undertake the care of her son” (13). These facts are all part of the exposition; even before the novel begins, Philip’s father was dead, his mother was dying, his uncle was gruff, and he was handicapped. It’s not as if his family were hit by a runaway carriage on page 40, killing his parents, laming Philip, and souring his uncle’s disposition; all these things were true even before the novel first introduces him. These troubles are the result of underlying chance.

After his mother dies, Philip moves to his uncle’s vicarage, where his only joys in life are a servant-girl’s “stories of the sea [which] touched Philip’s imagination [and imbued] the narrow alleys round the harbour . . . with all the romance which his young fancy could lend them” (30) and the picture-books of the Holy Land which Mrs. Carey shows him. These innocuous events, common stories and picture-books, are responsible for forming in Philip the wanderlust which carries him aimlessly through foreign locales in the middle portion of the novel.

As a young man, the vicar sends Philip to “King’s School at Tercanbury [where] the neighbouring clergy sent their sons” (38). Though he is a promising student, he “shivered at the thought of living [the life of a clergyman]; he wanted to get out into the world” (83). From this point on, Philip does go out into the world: to Germany, France, and finally back to England. It would seem that these experiences would affect the further formation of his character, but they do so only in a limited sense: his individual experiences don’t matter, only the sum of his experiences. Philip does make friends:

Rose and Sharp at school; Hayward and Weeks in Germany; Clutton, Flanagan, Lawson, and Cronshaw in France; and Dunsford and Newson in England. Philip also engages in transitory love affairs: Miss Wilkinson in Germany, Miss Price in France, and Mildred and Norah in England. But none of these friendships or dalliances has a decisive or lasting effect on his character; they are relationships of convenience. Philip corresponds with his friends only when he is with them, and he spends more time dealing with the unforeseen negative consequences of his relationships than he does in the relationships themselves. This is not to deny that these people have superficial effects on him—for example, Hayward and Weeks teach Philip that “religion was a matter upon which discussion was possible” (114), causing him to eventually abandon his religion (never especially strong to begin with). Also, Sharp and Miss Wilkinson inspire him to travel, to Germany and France respectively. In many other cases, Philip’s contemporaries inspire him to make minor changes in his lifestyle and world view, but none of these changes have a deep or lasting effect on his character.

Some time later, upon the death of his aunt, Philip returns home. Disgusted with his aimless wandering, his uncle confronts him, saying “You’re no longer a boy, you know; you must begin to think of settling down. First you insist on becoming a chartered accountant, and then you tire of that and you want to become a painter. And now, if you please, you change your mind again. It points to . . .” (254). Philip finishes his uncle’s sentence, defining his “defects of character” as “irresolution, incompetence, want of foresight, and lack of determination” (254). Philip is well aware of his faults; he simply does not care. Up to this point and further beyond it, Philip is in a holding pattern, doing

nothing of consequence and following a creed defined by a “total lack of positive values” (Naik 55).

One critic, Woodburn Ross, disagrees with this analysis. Although he readily concedes that Of Human Bondage is “principally concerned not with events but with a philosophy” (117), he nonetheless argues:

Each major episode, beginning with Philip Carey’s early discovery of the importance of his physical limitations, puts another bar across the window of human freedom. Philip loses faith in the religion which preaches free will; he learns that his own intense desire to paint does not confer upon him the requisite ability; he loves Mildred; he feels the pinch of poverty; and he finally comes to see the development of life as the unfolding of a pattern which has no significance but which chance may prove to be aesthetically pleasing [what some critics have called the ‘Persian carpet’ theory of life]. (117)

This statement begs a question: why do these specific instances “put bars across the window of human freedom” when similar events that occurred previously do not? For instance, Philip was a failed accountant before he was a failed painter; he carries on with both Miss Wilkinson and Fanny Price before Mildred—what makes the latter cases “major episodes”?

Even assuming that Ross cites these specific cases as examples of a phenomenon rather than an authoritative list of major psychological episodes (which the context of his article does not support), there still remains the problem of proving that these experiences have an effect upon Philip’s character. If these episodes do change Philip, then he ought to change his patterns of behavior after they occur. When Philip renounces his faith, it

made less difference in his behaviour than he expected. Though he had thrown on one side the Christian dogmas it never occurred to him to criticize the Christian ethics; he accepted the Christian virtues, and indeed thought it fine to practice them for their own sake . . . He was so young and had so few friends that immortality had no particular attractions for him, and he was able without trouble to give up belief in it. (118, 119)

The only lasting result of Philip's renunciation of religion is sporadic feelings of guilt, none acute enough that he feels compelled to act upon them. His loss of religion doesn't change his system of morality, nor does his failure as a painter inspire him to find a career in which he can succeed. His love affairs are transitory, and while he doesn't particularly enjoy being poor, neither does he make any special effort to escape his poverty. None of these events significantly affect Philip's life or the plot of Of Human Bondage.

The next event that does affect Philip's character occurs in a single moment, perhaps a moment in which Philip processes all his experiences up to that point. In the middle of a conversation about his former world-traveling, Philip realizes that a man need not leave his life to chance, but that his will was powerful; he seemed to see that self-control might be as passionate and as active as the surrender to passion; he seemed to see that the inward life might be as manifold, as varied, as rich with experience, as the life of one who conquered realms and explored unknown lands. (437)

After this epiphany, Philip sets out to put his life in order. He makes the man he was speaking to, Mr. Athelny, into a valued friend, one whom he expends significant effort to

maintain, traveling to visit him and giving gifts to his children, among other efforts. He takes a menial job to support himself, that of a “shop-walker” at a department store (503). Though a younger Philip had considered his entrance to medical school “rather a lark” (399), after his revelation he joins the medical profession in earnest. Finally, he cultivates a serious romantic relationship with Athelny’s daughter Sally. Of Human Bondage ends with Philip renouncing all future world-traveling and proposing marriage to her. His actions make it evident that there has been a fundamental and dramatic difference made to his character, and this epiphany is the most likely catalyst.

Of Human Bondage follows a scheme of cause and effect into which no random acts are allowed. Philip’s loneliness as a child inspires him to dream of faraway places, which he visits once he becomes old enough. The experiences he acquires in his travels make him realize that he needs to settle down. Random acts of chance do not occur to divert him from his course; each step in his journey through life is the logical and natural progression of the previous step.

The novels of W. Somerset Maugham deny random chance the opportunity to affect their characters and plots through the simplest possible expedient—that of excluding chance itself from the novel. Neither in Liza of Lambeth nor in Of Human Bondage does chance intrude. In the former, a girl from the slums makes bad romantic decisions and suffers as a result; in the latter, a young man whose deformity isolates him from society wanders aimlessly through life for a time before deciding to settle down. Chance does not occur in these novels to any meaningful extent.

Chapter IV – D. H. Lawrence

Lawrence's method of avoiding meaningful chance comes closer to Maugham's simplicity than Hardy's complexity. In fact, Hardy's method and Lawrence's method are sufficiently different that some critics suggest that "one of [Lawrence's] major objections to Hardy was his habit of stringing fatal consequences onto chance events" (Kelly 103). Whereas Hardy puts his characters into unlikely situations to demonstrate that they do not affect their behavior, Lawrence avoids the effects of chance by simply limiting the incidence of chance within his novels. However, just as the novels of D. H. Lawrence are more complex than those of Maugham, so must be the techniques used to prevent chance from acting upon the story. Like Maugham, Lawrence prevents random chance from acting upon his plots by excluding it entirely. Unlike Maugham's characters, Lawrence's go through frequent changes in the course of his novels, changes for which he has to account. Without spelling out, or at least implying a natural reason for each change, Lawrence runs the risk of his readers attributing the changes to random chance. He avoids this risk by following a rule of strict causality, clearly attributing each significant change in a character or plot to a phenomenon natural to the novel in question.

D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, published in 1913, is similar to the other dramatic novels covered in this thesis in that it focuses on both the professional and love lives of its characters. It is the story of the Morels, Walter Morel, a coal-miner, and Gertrude, a gentlewoman who married below her station, and (from oldest to youngest)

their four children, William, Annie, Arthur, and Paul. It is also autobiographical.

Lawrence's "father was a coal miner and his mother 'married down'" (DeMott vii).

Furthermore, Lawrence injects many of his personal experiences directly into the story of his protagonist, Paul Morel. Like D. H. Lawrence, Paul's "promising older brother died young" (vii); like Lawrence, Paul "went to work at sixteen . . . in a truss factory" (vii).

The similarities between the historical figure of D. H. Lawrence and the literary figure of Paul Morel are too persistent to ignore.

What then do these similarities imply for the thesis? If Sons and Lovers is in some part an autobiographical work, then does it not logically follow that the novel's plot, at least in parts, is not a literary invention, but an account of actual events? If so, then the strict causality in the novel may not be a stylistic decision on Lawrence's part, but rather a decision to portray events as they actually occurred. Possibly, if not for the fact that Lawrence does nothing in Sons that he does not also do in his purely invented novels. Lawrence portrays characters ruled by their passions, characters whose every action can be ultimately traced back to their nature rather than an act of chance.

The theme of strict causality is most present in the areas of Sons that Lawrence covers most intensely: the marriage of the first generation Morels, and the lives and loves of the oldest and youngest children, William and Paul.

The first generation Morels, Walter and Gertrude, have an unhappy marriage because they meet and marry so rapidly that their romantic misconceptions have no time to fade. Walter Morel is attracted to Gertrude Coppard because "she was to the miner that thing of mystery and fascination, a lady" (15). Conversely, Gertrude is attracted to him because "he was so full of colour and animation" (15) and she is intrigued by what

she describes as a “golden softness of this man’s sensuous flame of life” (16). The trouble with this attraction of opposites is that it directly causes their later antagonism. Part of the gentility that Walter sees in Gertrude is her puritan nature, which is entirely opposed to the drinking and dancing that were an integral part of Walter’s earlier life, symptoms of the sensuality that attracted her to him in the first place. This process of mutual disillusionment is gradual; in fact, “for three months she was perfectly happy [and] for six months she was very happy” (16). But even in this description of Gertrude’s marital bliss there is a sense that the situation is steadily worsening, that they made the decision to marry ignorant of the fact that their attraction was the effect of their own irreconcilable differences.

This widening fissure between the Morels is the result of clashing personalities, but that it not to say that it is not punctuated by and accelerated by concrete events, specific confrontations between the two. One example of a significant event is the first confrontation they have as a married couple, when Gertrude discovers that Walter has lied to her about his financial situation. He “had told her that the house he lived in, and the next one, were his own” (18), when in fact, both houses belong to Walter’s mother, and it was “as much as [she could] do to keep the mortgage interest paid” (18). Still, while these events do cause changes in their marriage, they are the effect of the character’s personalities. When Walter’s desire to impress Gertrude causes him to lie to her about the house, which alarms and enrages her, both the intermediate effect (the lie) and the ultimate effect (Gertrude’s fright and anger) are the result of this character trait; chance is left safely out of this chain of strict causality. Gertrude “was too much [Walter’s] opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have

him the much that he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him [and] injured and hurt and scarred herself" (21).

William Morel's rises in station and his difficulties in love are the result of his character. At an early age, his mother recognizes in him an ambition, a desire to enjoy "all the life that Bestwood [his village] offered" (56). At the tender age of thirteen, William starts working to improve his station from a clerking job in his village to a more lucrative clerking job elsewhere. He "went to the night-school, and learned shorthand, so that by the time he was sixteen he was the best shorthand clerk and book-keeper on the place, except one" (56). In three years, he gets a better position in Nottingham, and a year later he is hired to work in London for a salary that his family describes as "fabulous" (58). But William's ambition is not limited to career advancement; he is also interested in social advancement, and this too his mother recognizes from an early age. As a sixteen-year-old, William "began to consort with the sons of the chemist, the schoolmaster, and the tradesmen" and to engage in mild flirtations with their daughters (56, 57). When both distinct desires are examined jointly, it appears that the larger unifying ambition is not wealth, financial security, or importance, but recognition, a desire to feel important. William's desire for social advancement rules out the first three larger ambitions. Seeing and being seen in novel places and with distinguished people does not mesh with wealth, security, or genuine importance.

It is this desire for perceived importance that causes William's death. It is responsible for his attraction to Gipsy, "a lady, after whom the men were running thick and fast" (93), and a lady for whom William is obviously unsuited. William himself describes her as a flighty girl who puts on airs (119), a spendthrift and a fool (132). But

William's fixation upon recognition overrides his dissatisfaction with those qualities; he is not willing to give up "the dances to which he went with his betrothed, and the different resplendent clothes she wore . . . [and] how they went to the theatre like great swells" (116). Also, taking care of the "wessel-brained" (132) Gipsy satisfies his desire to feel important; she relies on him to provide for her. This responsibility and the new pleasures that William discovers in London cause him to "spin rather giddily on the quick current of the new life" (93). Between the gadfly social life he has with Gipsy and the extra hours he put in at the office to support her, William exhausts himself to death. The family sees it coming. He grows progressively weaker, but they are powerless to intervene. William's love of recognition draws him to court Gipsy, who is directly responsible for his death.

William's character is responsible for every major development in his life. Thus, chance does not affect him in a meaningful way. No chance encounter inspires him to take his initial clerking position, nor are happy accidents responsible for his promotions. Likewise, his love affair with Gipsy and early death ultimately spring from his character alone; chance takes no hand in these events.

Paul's relationship with his mother is responsible for the complexity of his subsequent relationships with women. Because Paul is the first baby born after her marriage with Walter has completely soured,

she had dreaded this baby [Paul] like a catastrophe . . . And now she felt strangely towards the infant. Her heart was heavy because of the child, almost as if it were unhealthy, or malformed. Yet it seemed quite well. But she noticed the peculiar knitting of the baby's brows, and the peculiar heaviness of its eyes, as if

it were trying to understand something that was pain. She felt, when she looked at the child's dark, brooding pupils, as if a burden were on her heart (40).

She feels that because there is no more love between her and her husband, Paul's life would be loveless as well. She resolves that "with all her force, with all her soul she would make up to it for having brought it into the world unloved. She would love it all the more now it was here; carry it in her love" (41). As Paul grows from an infant into a young man, she continues to shower him with love, and she comes to depend on his love in return. This intense bond between mother and son is responsible for complicating Paul's love life. It arrests his relationship with his first love Miriam.

The ups and downs of Paul's relationship with Miriam are sometimes surprising. When Paul and Miriam first make love, "afterwards he loved her-loved her to the last fibre of his being. He loved her. But he wanted, somehow, to cry . . . and there remained afterwards the sense of failure and of death" (282). Afterwards, he proposes marriage to Miriam, but at the next instant, after she suggests they wait a while to marry, he makes the decision to break it off and not see her again. Throughout the novel, Paul switches regularly between these two extremes.

Paul's peculiar behavior is not motivated by chance or random impulse, but by his relationship with his mother. When their relationship is strong, Mrs. Morel believes that Miriam wants to steal Paul away from her and takes steps to forestall further courtship. On one occasion, she throws a fit, "[throwing] her arms around his neck, [hiding] her face on his shoulder, and [crying], in a whimpering voice, so unlike her own that he writhed in agony. 'I can't bear it. I could let another woman-but not her. She'd leave me no room,

not a bit of room-’ And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly” (209). Mrs. Morel is too jealous of Paul’s love to allow him to continue in a passionate relationship with Miriam.

But when Paul and Miriam are not close, Gertrude stops campaigning against Miriam, and time erodes away at Paul’s mother-induced “hatred” of her. After his mother’s outburst, he limits his relations with Miriam to correspondence. He declares that their former relationship was merely an abstraction, a sexless relationship between “mystic monk” and “mystic nun” (245). As time passes, their relationship grows from bloodless correspondence to close friendship and finally to sexual intimacy. At this point, Paul’s mother intercedes again.

In this way, Lawrence uses a system of strict causality to describe the confusing relationship between Paul and Miriam without attributing any meaningful changes to acts of chance or random impulse. Though their relationship undergoes fluctuations that are both frequent and extreme, Lawrence makes it clear that these changes are inspired by natural factors: Gertrude’s jealousy and the passage of time.

In The Rainbow, published two years later (in 1915), Lawrence treats romantic relationships much as he did in Sons, only with the added wrinkle that Rainbow deals with the relationships of multiple generations of the same family, the Brangwens. In Rainbow, as in Sons, Lawrence makes every important plot development the result of a series of other developments, denying chance the opportunity to make characters act contrary to their nature. He makes this tendency most evident through Rainbow’s main characters: Tom Brangwen, who pursues and marries the widow of an aristocratic Polish doctor, Lydia Lensky. Though Lawrence deals with two more generations of Brangwens (Lydia’s daughter, Anna Lensky, who marries her first cousin by marriage, William

Brangwen, and Anna's daughter Ursula, who marries Anton Skrebensky), the stories of these two couples are variations on the theme that William and Lydia's relationship establishes. Out of consideration for the length of this thesis, I have chosen to use the first relationship to represent all three.

At the age of nineteen, Tom Brangwen has an experience that makes him shy away from relationships with women: when Tom "was drunk at a public house" he is seduced by a prostitute (14). Before this, Tom's conception of woman was that which he had formed "in the close intimacy of the farm kitchen . . . [where] the woman was the symbol for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality . . . [the] conscience-keeper [and the] angel at the doorway" (14,15). Understandably, this has a grave effect on his character; it gives him "a first taste of ash and of cold fear . . . lest his relations with women were going to be no more than this nothingness" (15). The shock of this experience prevents him from pursuing a relationship for many years. He finds himself incapable of viewing "nice" women in a romantic light, and "loose" women revolt him (16).

Certainly this encounter with the prostitute is a chance event, and certainly it has a meaningful effect on Tom's character. However, chance does not dictate the result of this encounter. In other words, Tom's "taste of ash and of cold fear" is not a foregone conclusion of his sexual encounter with a prostitute. Tom reacts the way he does because this event interacts with an element of his character, his respect for women. If he had contracted syphilis as a result of this encounter, this would have been a result dictated by chance. Instead, Tom learns that his respect for women is too strong to allow him to

engage in meaningless sexual encounters. Tom's discomfort with casual sex is latent in his personality; the chance encounter only serves to bring it out.

When Tom is twenty-three he encounters a woman who is neither "nice" nor "loose," a "handsome, reckless girl neglected for an afternoon by the man who had brought her out" (17). She is an exception to his hang-ups; she is forward, so obviously not "nice," but not really interested in him, so not "loose" either. Tom stays on to meet this man, an aristocratic foreigner, and finds himself equally as attracted to him as to the woman herself. While the woman renders him "afraid to death of being too forward, ashamed lest he be thought backward, mad with desire yet restrained by instinctive regard for women from making any definite approach" (18), the man inspires in Tom a love "for his exquisite graciousness, for his tact and reserve, and for his ageless, monkey-like self-surety . . . his gracious manner [and] the fine contact" (20).

This second chance encounter provides Tom with a way to escape the "taste of ash and of cold fear" that the episode with the prostitute had instilled in him. After this meeting, "no sooner was his mind free . . . than he began to imagine an intimacy with fine-textured, subtle-mannered people such as the foreigner at Matlock, and amidst this subtle intimacy was always the satisfaction of a voluptuous woman" (21). Though the women of Tom's village are too similar to the prostitute for him to consider a relationship with them, this encounter gives him an idea for a solution. Tom's attraction to the two people makes him realize that if he could find a woman sufficiently different, sufficiently outside of his experience, then he would not feel inhibited from pursuing a relationship with her. Tom decides to look for such a woman, and he finds her in Lydia Lensky.

Like the episode with the prostitute, Tom's encounter with the foreigner and his woman is a chance event which has a meaningful effect on the plot of The Rainbow. However, Tom's attraction to exotic women is not a foregone conclusion of this encounter but a result of his character. Though the prostitute inhibited him from subsequent relationships, she did not affect Tom's sex drive. Tom, like other Lawrence characters, is ruled by his passions; he is not content to live out the remainder of his life celibate. So when he finds himself attracted to the "reckless girl" he meets in a chance encounter, his loneliness and sexual frustration drive him to parlay this attraction into a way of escaping his inhibitive "taste of ash and of cold fear." Tom's character motivates his response to this chance event. Thus, chance alone does not dictate a result.

At the age of twenty-eight, Tom Brangwen sees Lydia Lensky for the first time and is immediately attracted. As soon as he sees her face, "'That's her,' he said involuntarily" (24). Upon asking about her and discovering that she was foreign and an aristocrat, "the widow of a Polish doctor" (27), Tom feels "a curious certainty about her, as if she were destined to him . . . [and] a profound satisfaction that she was a foreigner" (27). Days after their first conversation, pleasantries exchanged in the course of one of her errands, "it came upon [Tom] that he would marry her and she would be his life" (35). This is how strongly Tom's experiences affect him, that he would marry this woman that he has known so shortly.

Likewise, Lydia Lensky's decision to accept Tom's proposal is the result of her experiences in life. Lydia's decision to marry Paul Lensky is an example of underlying chance. Lydia's first husband was a fanatical Marxist, a "fire-eater." Consumed by the Revolution, he "carried [Lydia] along in . . . his whirl of patriotism" and neglected their

children, who died of diphtheria in their absence (45, 46). When Paul dies in England, the trauma of her life in Poland leaves her with no desire to return. Thus, underlying chance is indirectly responsible for Lydia living in Tom Brangwen's hometown. However, her decision to accept his proposal is not in any way the result of chance. She describes the "one blind instinct [which] led her to take him" as safety. "She felt the rooted safety of him, and the life in him. Also he was young and very fresh. The blue, steady livingness of his eyes she enjoyed like morning. He was very young" (50). Lydia accepts Tom's proposal because he offers her a security that has been conspicuously absent from her life up to this point. His youth and health are another aspect of this security; Tom is unlikely to die on Lydia as her former husband has done.

Given concrete examples from the texts in question, Lawrence's technique of strict causality becomes more clear. To use The Rainbow as an example, the extremism of Lydia's first husband is responsible for bringing her to England, while the tranquility of the countryside is responsible for making her receptive to Tom's advances.

Meanwhile, Tom's encounter with a prostitute in his youth makes him shy away from local women, and his meeting with a foreign aristocrat engenders in him a taste for the exotic. Finally Tom and Lydia end up together when Tom's taste for the exotic draws him to her and Lydia's desire for safety draws her to him. There is an almost-mechanical scheme of strict causality here: A causes B causes C, which is ultimately responsible for D. Each development in the plot is directly attributable to a previous development; nothing is left solely to chance.

However, two events are left partly to chance. I have conceded that both Tom's episode with the prostitute and his episode with the foreigner and his woman are chance

encounters. Though they do not contradict the argument of my thesis (that chance does not dictate the characters' actions in serious literature), they do differ from how I have structured my argument previously. For the bulk of the thesis, my argument has been that no chance that does not underlie a novel has significance to its plot. Does this difference not constitute a problem?

I believe it does not. To determine if chance dictates a character's actions, a necessary first step is to establish whether or not chance exists in a particular situation. If not, the process can stop right there (if no chance occurs, then obviously chance cannot dictate the character's actions). There is no need for the process to go to the next step, looking for evidence that the event is in keeping with the character's nature.

Chapter V-Transition

To recapitulate, the serious genre of this “transitional period” in British literature requires that its characters have and be perceived to have free will. If the characters do not have free will, if random acts of chance can force these characters to act contrary to their nature, then they are no longer believable people. Thus, they are no longer the subject of serious literature. Leaving aside the normative question of free will and seriousness, there is evidence to support the positive contention that this genre of literature does not limit the will of the characters by making their lives and decisions subject to random chance. The dramatic literature of Victorian, Edwardian, and modern Britain supports this contention. Thomas Hardy’s characters are not subject to chance; he makes a point to first confront them with chance and then show that their decisions have not been affected. W. Somerset Maugham’s characters are not subject to chance; Maugham presents scenarios in which chance does not occur, and therefore cannot affect his characters. D. H. Lawrence’s characters are not subject to chance; he has contrived a rigid scheme of cause-and-effect, which his novels scrupulously follow, for the purpose of demonstrating that his characters are unaffected by random chance. It appears to be a genuine convention in serious turn-of-the-century British literature that random chance may not affect the development of the plot.

The comic literature of this same region and period, on the other hand, is not bound by this convention. The comic author is free to include or exclude chance without

regard for believability. Therefore, in addition to the underlying and incidental chance allowed by the serious literature, the comic literature also features a third brand of chance: dynamic chance. Dynamic chance is a term which I have coined to describe that chance which occurs after the action of the story has begun, and which necessarily affects the behavior of the characters.

Though the comic literature does not seem to demand such scrutiny as the serious literature, as the goal for the comedic is to prove that all apparent instances of chance are indeed genuine, it is nonetheless important to discriminate between that chance allowable in serious literature (underlying and incidental chance) and the dynamic chance permissible only in the comic. Allowing the lines between varieties of chance to blur in comedic literature would undermine the value of the comparison between genres. For this purpose, it is useful to provide examples from the texts. The enmity between two schoolboys in The White Feather, Sheen and Stanning (18, 19), is the product of underlying chance because the events that caused the hostility occurred before the story began. In another novel, the failure of George, Harris, and Jerome to catch their train (Three Men 42, 43) is an example of incidental chance because nothing becomes of it. Neither of these two conditions apply to Sheen's random encounter of a fight in the streets (Feather 38, 39). Because it happens after the story has gotten well underway, and because his refusal to participate causes him to be ostracized by his fellow students (Feather 49, 50), it does qualify as dynamic chance.

Chapter VI – Jerome K. Jerome

Jerome K. Jerome's two novels Three Men in a Boat and Tommy and Co were published in 1889 and 1907, respectively. Three Men in a Boat is the story of three men, George, Harris, and Jerome, on a boat trip on the river Thames. As the scope of the novel is so narrow, events which would be quite minor in another story take on a greater importance within the context of Three Men. No character dies in the course of the novel, for instance, nor does anyone rise in station or fall in love. The scope of Three Men is limited to a three-week boat trip, which means that an event need only affect the trip to be significant to the novel. Dynamic chance affects the plot of Three Men in a Boat by first inspiring the trip, and then by affecting the enjoyment that the three men take in it.

The trip itself is inspired by a conversation that Jerome and the two other principals have over dinner. Jerome begins by commenting that it is a natural phenomenon to feel some level of hypochondria; he says that he “never reads a patent-medicine advertisement without being impelled to the conclusion that [he is] suffering from the particular disease therein dealt with in its most virulent form” (5). So when Harris volunteers that he “felt such extraordinary fits of giddiness come over him at times that he hardly knew what he was doing” (5), his friends all discover that they have ailments too (5). Further into the discussion, they conclude that what they want is rest, as “the overstrain upon [their] brains has produced a general depression throughout the

system” (9). Though dynamic chance does occur in the novel, this initial conversation is ambiguous. When the story begins, the three men “were . . . smoking and talking about how bad [they] were . . . from a medical point of view” (5). This statement could be interpreted either as evidence that the men had already begun the conversation, or as a broad narrative introduction to a conversation just now taking place. If the three men had begun their conversation before the book begins, then it is an episode of underlying chance rather than dynamic, and therefore their decision to vacation is not the result of chance. Given that the statement is ambiguous, I will not attempt to argue either interpretation. The thesis does not require that every plot development in a comic story be a result of random chance, only some, and what follows is certainly an episode of dynamic chance.

After the three men conclude that they need a vacation, they discuss their options and decide finally to adopt George’s proposal to “go up the river” (13). Their decision is impulsive; less than a week separate this conversation from their departure. It is also unprecedented, as none of the three men had any experience with a long boat trip. George is the only one to profess experience, and the events to follow prove that “George was a miserable impostor” (26). Furthermore, there is no particular reason for them to have chosen this suggestion over the alternatives, an isolated holiday resort and a sea trip. Hence, chance is responsible for their decision to go boating—the trip is motivated by the unpredictable sequence of an idle conversation.

Dynamic chance continues to affect the three men even after the trip gets underway. For instance, when Jerome forgets that he is steering and upsets the boat, it delays their journey by several hours and dampens their mood for days afterward.

Throughout the boat trip, chance frequently dictates the actions of the three men. They stop on the riverbank for lunch only to be angrily confronted for trespassing and miss the lock that their map directs them to take so that they wander lost for a good while afterwards. Three Men in a Boat is driven by accidents; although random events fail to contribute to a dramatic or decisive event in absolute terms (social advancement or regression, the formation or dissolution of important relationships, etc), they all have a relative effect within the confines of the story.

In the first third of the boat trip, the three men look for an inn on “the Saturday before the August Bank Holiday” (102), and are turned away from all eight inns and rooming-houses in town until they ask directions of a young boy whose “mother had a room to spare, and could put [them] up for the night” (105). Luck, either good or bad, is at play here—it does not seem likely that every rooming-house in town should be booked solid but that the first person they ask directions of should volunteer his home. When they set out the next morning, in the course of opening a tin of pineapple, Harris slices open his hand and George suffers a blow to the head. Finally, they collide with another boat. In these accidents, chance dictates the result in a way that the serious literature shies away from.

In the second third of the boat trip, the three men disembark from their boat to eat lunch “in a wide, open field [without] a tree or a bit of hedge for hundreds of yards” (121). Harris falls into a concealed pit. When they decide to re-enter the boat and head back down the river, they discover that their boat is not where they left it—it has drifted into a nest of especially territorial swans. Again, these accidents are not motivated or affected by the three men’s characters; chance, not character, is dictating the results.

In the last third of the boat trip, the weather turns rainy. Though George, Harris, and Jerome can tolerate the weather “for the first few hours” (164), the rain continues to “pour down with quiet consistency” (165). George remembers a friend of his who “had slept out in a damp boat on just another night such as this, and it had given him rheumatic fever, nothing was able to save him, and he had died in great agony ten days afterward” (165). Because the three men decide to abandon their trip shortly afterward, it appears that the rainfall and George’s chance comment are examples of dynamic chance. However, neither factor dictates a result. The men choose to abandon their trip because it has not gone as well as they had hoped it would. Thus, their decision to end the trip prematurely is the result of their characters.

Three Men in a Boat features multiple examples of dynamic chance. Chance in a conversation inspires the three men to take a boat-trip, and chance in the boat-trip causes various accidents and upsets. It is true that the plot developments caused by chance are not exactly momentous, but neither is the scope of the novel. If Three Men were to cover the full lives of George, Harris, and Jerome, the boating accidents I’ve mentioned here would be of negligible importance to the novel. But in the context of a three-week boat-trip, they are quite important.

Jerome’s later novel Tommy and Co features both more momentous plot developments and a wider scope. Whereas Three Men covers the experiences of three men on a brief boat trip, Tommy covers the events related to a London newspaper for around twenty years (Tommy begins the book as a foundling child and ends it as a mature woman). Tommy and Co is a series of seven interrelated stories, centering on the staff of a weekly journal, the *Good Humour*. Dynamic chance plays a large part in these stories;

it is responsible both for bringing the members of the staff together, moving them separately toward joining the staff, and for affecting their lives as individuals.

Tommy and Co begins when the future editor of the paper, Peter Hope, meets his future staff writer and adopted daughter, Tommy. Their meeting is the result of Tommy's learning by chance that Peter has need of a domestic servant. Peter tells Mrs. Postwhistle, the manager of a nearby lodging-house, who mentions it to Mother Hammond, the manager of an eating-house, while Tommy is around to overhear. Also, the book makes it clear that Peter takes her in only because her name is the same as his dead son, Thomas, and her obvious distress causes "Peter's common sense [to go] out of the room disgusted, and there was born the history of many things" (15). Because Tommy proves inept at household chores, and is too stubborn to accept simple charity, Peter makes her his assistant in journalism (his "printer's devil"). She does this so well that

out of the shadows crept to Peter Hope an old forgotten dream – the dream of a wonderful new Journal, price one penny weekly, of which the Editor should come to be one Thomas Hope, son of Peter Hope, its honoured Founder and Originator: a powerful Journal that should supply a long-felt want, popular, but at the same time elevating—a pleasure to the public, a profit to its owners. (45)

Because Peter adopts Tommy, a chance event, he is inspired him to found the *Good Humour*, the magazine that Tommy's plot centers around.

Dynamic chance allows Peter to make his dream into a reality. Peter knows a businessman, William Clodd, who believes that "a weekly journal with Peter Hope as editor, and William Clodd as manager, would be bound to be successful" (62). However,

the two men lack sufficient capital to fund this company. This changes when William stumbles upon a wealthy lunatic, an elderly man who pretends to be various animals, among them, a tortoise, by "crawling about on his stomach with a tea-tray tied on to [his] back," and a vole, by "taking all his meals underneath the carpet" (52). William takes care of this man until his death and receives a substantial bequest from him in exchange. In this way, random chance also provides the two men with the capital they need to start the *Good Humour*.

In a successive story, William and Peter find a fashion editor for their paper. Miss Ramsbotham is a staff writer for the paper, and though she is "endowed by Nature with every feminine quality calculated to inspire liking, she had, on the other hand, been disinherited of every attribute calculated to excite passion" (120). Miss Ramsbotham cannot be considered feminine in a Victorian sense. She prefers political discussions to gossip and has resigned herself to living alone (121). However, she finds herself inexplicably attracted to a "remarkably foolish-looking lad of about two-and-twenty . . . [who] a little while before she would have seized upon merrily to ridicule" (132, 134). This attraction drives her to remake herself according to his expectations of a woman. She asks to be made *Good Humour's* fashion editor, and to be paid in clothes from the establishment she reviews. Miss Ramsbotham's chance attraction to an unworthy man is responsible for the addition of the post of fashion editor to the *Good Humour*, as well as a dramatic change in her character.

Dynamic chance has a similar effect on several other characters in the novel. It drives Joey Leveredge, a lifelong bachelor with "an excellent and devoted cook and house-keeper" to take care of him (161), to marry. His decision is so sudden and so

unprecedented that “when the news of his engagement crept through the smoky portals of [his social club] nobody believed it” (166). Dynamic chance is also responsible for the epiphany that motivates Richard Danvers, Tommy’s future husband, to renounce his dissolute lifestyle and seek respectable employment. In addition to affecting the characters’ lives, dynamic chance also affects their careers. Joey Leveredge joins the *Good Humour* as social editor because Peter helps him with an unexpected problem with his new wife. Philip Tweetel, an office boy, joins the staff because of a chance meeting in which he impresses William. In each of the seven episodes which make up Tommy and Co, acts of chance have meaningful effects upon their respective plots.

This is not to say that all chance that occurs in the novel is necessarily meaningful. One example of incidental chance occurs in the episode devoted to Philip Tweetel, an effeminate young man. While dressed up as a woman to solicit an advertisement for the paper, Philip happens to encounter a group of his friends, who recognize him. Pretending that they believe he is actually his sister, they take him on several dates over the course of two days: “to Madame Tussaud’s . . . up the Monument . . . to the Tower of London . . . [and] to the Polytechnic to see Pepper’s Ghost, [making] a merry party wherever they went” (239, 240). This practical joke has no effect on Philip beyond a temporary discomfort, and so this chance encounter in no way affects the outcome of the story

Chapter VII – P. G. Wodehouse

Like Jerome K. Jerome, P. G. Wodehouse “seems to possess neither the conscious irony nor the undercurrent of angst which make [an author of comic work] a candidate for high seriousness” (Mooneyham 114). Mooneyham goes on to suggest that rather than mirroring the problems of the world, Wodehouse’s “comic structures . . . characteristically include happy endings and a newly remade society marked by a sense of tolerance and accommodation” (115). Furthermore, P. G. Wodehouse uses chance to divert events from their expected outcomes. Shown a young couple with an obstacle to their love, a reader expects one of two outcomes: either they overcome the obstacle, and the young man and the young woman end up together, or they don’t. Wodehouse uses a chance event to inspire the woman to marry the young man’s uncle instead. He does this so systematically that readers familiar with Wodehouse come to expect unusual outcomes; the unpredictable becomes predictable.

Though his novels unfold in unpredictable ways, it should be noted that Wodehouse, like Lawrence, adheres to a rigid scheme of cause and effect. According to critic Laura Mooneyham,

[Wodehouse] expected each of his narrative structures to be a unity, a seamless artifact of cause and effect. He was maniacal about plot, often writing preliminary synopses for his novels that ran over sixty thousand words to guarantee clockwork plot maneuvers; accordingly, he seemed to believe that the

highest aesthetic criterion would judge whether the arrow of action in a narrative ran true. (120-121)

Chance does not play an active role in Wodehouse novels because the chains of cause and effect are somehow faulty; rather, an unpredictable event arises because the ultimate cause in the chain is itself unprecedented. Once the peculiar genesis of one of these chains is accepted as a given, the other events in the chain naturally follow. For instance, if lightning should strike the upraised club of a golfer killing the man and causing his estranged wife to inherit the estate, both his death and his wife's inheritance are natural links in the chain, in spite of the rarity of the initial event. Chance plays an active role in the development of Wodehouse's plots through the introduction of unusual events and scenarios.

Three story universes for which Wodehouse is well-known are: one, his juveniles, novels following roughly eighteen and nineteen year old protagonists at Wrykyn, a British boarding school, usually with a sports-related spin; two, his Psmith novels, stories of a crafty and unpredictable young aristocrat; and three, his books about Jeeves and Wooster, the ingenious valet and his foolish and kind-hearted employer. Consequently, the three novels I will discuss are examples of these three story universes, The White Feather, published in 1907, Psmith in the City, published in 1910, and My Man Jeeves, published in 1919. It should be noted that this is by no means a comprehensive list of notable Wodehouse protagonists. In addition to Wrykyn, Psmith, Jeeves and Wooster, he also invented Ukridge, Mr. Mulliner, and the characters associated with Blandings Castle (Lord Emsworth and his neighbors and family members). Though I would have liked to include examples of these three story universes, they lie for the most part outside the time

period covered in the thesis. With the exception of a few isolated stories published before 1915, the overwhelming bulk of them occur after 1925 (McCrum 504-507).

The title of The White Feather derives its name from a British colloquialism meaning cowardice. According to British tradition, a rooster with white plumage is less aggressive, and is an inferior specimen for the sport of cockfighting. British women during World War I made it a practice to gather in public places and offer white feathers to men of enlistment age not wearing military uniforms, hoping to shame them into volunteering (Ramsay 353). Not surprisingly, the plot of The White Feather concerns itself with cowardice: the development of its protagonist Sheen from a timid bookworm to a boxing champion. This transformation occurs principally as the result of dynamic chance. It is important to note that this book is a comic juvenile, and as such, does not deal with as serious a subject matter as would other novels. Consequently, events and actions that would have a negligible impact in a more weighty book become in The White Feather more important, much like as in Jerome's Three Men in a Boat.

Sheen begins as a bookworm whose overriding desire is to win "an in-school scholarship, the Gotford" (17). He has asked for and received a special dispensation from playing sports, and he spends all his time indoors studying. Sheen is jarred out of this existence when his schoolmates start a fight with the locals and he "came upon the combatants some five minutes after battle had been joined" (38). He responds by "walk[ing] rapidly in the opposite direction" (39). Though his reaction (walking away) is certainly in keeping with his character, his encounter of a fight in the street is not. The White Feather makes it clear that Sheen is naturally hesitant to leave his school's campus, making the probability that he should encounter a fight in town extremely low.

Nonetheless, it does happen, and as a result of his refusal to join in, he is ostracized to the extent that he feels like he is "living in a world of ghosts, or rather, like being a ghost in a living world" (49).

Then, in a separate trip to town, Sheen sees another fight and entertains "a wild idea of doing something to restore his self-respect and his credit in the eyes of the house" (55). Leaving aside his "wild idea," which may or may not naturally occur to him, it is uncharacteristic of him to leave campus for the town, especially after what happened last time. He joins the fight and is rescued by Joe Bevan, who happens to be a former Light-Weight Champion of the World and willing to train Sheen to box. This seems an incredible coincidence—not that someone should show up to extricate Sheen from a fight that he's losing but that that someone should be a former world champion boxer. At the end of the story, he wins the light-weight championship at the Aldershot competition and gains the esteem of his peers.

Dynamic chance motivates Sheen to develop an interest outside of academics. Before he encounters the fight, he is uninterested in athletics. He has given up sports "by special arrangement . . . on the plea that he wanted all his time for work" (17). This only changes after his reaction to a chance encounter of a fight on the streets makes him an outcast at his school. Chance is also responsible for his subsequent popularity, through the fortuitous introduction of the boxing champion Joe Bevan.

Dynamic chance plays a similar role in Wodehouse's novel Psmith in the City, which tells the story of its protagonist Mike and his aristocratic friend Psmith shortly after their graduation from secondary school. Chance is responsible for diverting both

friends away from their prospective universities into employment at the New Asiatic Bank of London, and then from the bank back to a university again.

Psmith in the City begins with Mike and Psmith discussing their futures during a cricket match. Mike confidently announces that “I’m going to King’s [University],” while Psmith imagines less certainly that he’s going to Cambridge (13). However, chance intercedes to divert the both of them from their planned path—Mike’s father announces to him that he’s “lost a very large sum of money since [he] saw [Mike] last” (22). Consequently he finds a vacancy for Mike “in that flourishing institution, the New Asiatic Bank” (24). Meanwhile, Psmith’s father has a chance conversation with the bank’s manager, Mr. Bickersdyke. In this conversation, the latter makes the claim that “he wished he had [Psmith] under him in his bank, where, he asserted, he would knock some of the nonsense out of me” (44). This is certainly an example of dynamic chance—Mr. Jackson and Mr. Psmith, Sr., two men who had never met, both decide independently to send their sons to the same bank.

However, not every significant development in Psmith is the result of chance. Psmith’s following actions stem from his character. Psmith, Sr. and Bickersdyke met through a social club in London, the Senior Conservative club. Knowing this, Psmith contrives to annoy Bickersdyke in his free time, to “be his constant companion . . . in short, to haunt the man [and through] these strenuous means . . . get a bit of [his] own back” (47). He goes on to shadow him in the Senior Conservative and heckle him at a political rally—Bickersdyke is “the Unionist candidate for Kenningford” (39). Also, Psmith’s “adoption” of Mike is not motivated by chance—he pitches the arrangement to Mike as

“a business proposition. I offer you the post of confidential secretary and adviser to me in exchange for a comfortable home. The duties will be light. You will be required to refuse invitations to dinner from crowned heads, and to listen attentively to my views on Life. Apart from this, there is little to do. So that’s settled.” (52)

Dynamic chance occurs again when Psmith acquires a collection of the speeches Bickersdyke delivered when he was a fiery radical, documents which might seriously impede him in his drive to become the Unionist representative at Kenningford. Psmith acquires these documents accidentally—when he jokingly calls Mike “Comrade Jackson” (92), it gives Mike’s supervisor, Mr. Waller the idea that Psmith is a Socialist. Because Mr. Waller is an ardent Socialist, he invites them to hear him speak in the park and to have dinner with him afterwards. In the course of the dinner Mr. Waller happens to produce the speeches. This unlikely chain of coincidences is proof of the effect dynamic chance has on the plot. It also sets the stage for the third major manifestation of chance, when Mike’s supervisor makes the mistake of cashing a forged check. After Mr. Waller expresses his fear that he will be fired, Mike takes the blame for the mistake and is fired himself. Though Psmith subsequently blackmails Bickersdyke to restore Mike’s job, the threat is not quite severe enough to prevent Mike’s demotion to a position which makes him entirely miserable.

The final instance of dynamic chance is responsible for Mike and Psmith’s departure from the New Asiatic Bank and their eventual enrollment in Cambridge. When Mike’s brother calls him up to play for his county’s cricket team against Middlesex, Mike immediately takes off from work and Psmith soon follows suit. Neither man is too fond

of working at the bank, so Psmith's departure is a reasonable reaction to Mike's desertion, and Mike's love for the game of cricket makes his departure a reasonable response to getting the call. What makes this episode an example of dynamic chance is Mike's getting the call in the first place—he is only called because three of his brother's teammates were injured in a traffic accident and his team has only two substitutes. At this game, to which Psmith, Sr. comes as a spectator, Psmith is able to convince his father that his becoming a lawyer is a better career choice than his being a banker, and therefore to send both Mike and Psmith to Cambridge.

My Man, Jeeves is quite similar to Psmith in the City with regards to the profound effects of dynamic chance, though the difference in Jeeves' format causes it to take a somewhat different appearance. My Man, Jeeves is the first of the Jeeves and Wooster novels. It takes the form of eight loosely interwoven episodes, eight chapters that have their own respective beginnings and endings. They could each stand alone, if not for the fact that they refer to a common setting and cast of characters. Four of these chapters deal with the characters of Jeeves and Wooster; the other four deal with another Wodehouse regular, Reggie Pepper. Dynamic chance in Jeeves typically appears in two places: first, in each scenario's set-up, as the problem that Jeeves is expected to resolve for one of Wooster's friends, and then later, as the unintended consequences of his advice. The Reggie Pepper stories have a similar format; Reggie also attempts to resolve problems for his friends only to inspire unforeseen consequences.

The first episode in My Man, Jeeves is "Leave it to Jeeves," in which the readers are introduced to the two characters of Jeeves and Wooster. From the beginning Wodehouse makes it clear that much in their life is determined by chance. The two men

are in New York because Wooster “was sent over by [his] Aunt Agatha to stop young Gussie marrying a girl on the vaudeville stage, and [he] got the whole thing so messed up that [he] decided that it would be a sound scheme for [him] to stop on in America for a little bit instead of going back and having long cozy chats about the thing with the aunt” (9). Because these incidents occur before the episode began, they are examples of underlying chance rather than dynamic chance. Nonetheless, it gives some idea of the unpredictability of cause and effect in the Jeeves and Wooster universe.

The problem that occurs in this chapter is the situation I allude to in my introduction to Wodehouse. Wooster’s friend Corky wants to get married, but he is afraid that his uncle, Mr. Worple, will respond to the engagement by cutting off his allowance. Jeeves responds to this by proposing that Corky’s fiancée first ingratiate herself to the uncle by writing a book on Worple’s hobby, ornithology, and dedicating it to him. When Corky’s fiancé and his uncle meet, she ends up marrying Worple instead.

This first episode, like subsequent ones, follows the general pattern described above. The reader is introduced to Corky as “a pal of [Wooster’s] cousin Gussie . . . a portrait-painter . . . [who] managed to get along by drawing an occasional picture for the comic painters” (9, 10). Nowhere in the exposition is a mention of Corky’s romantic life, which makes his arrival on Wooster’s doorstep as an engaged man a surprising development. The story then proceeds normally, until his fiancée discovers that she is more attracted to Corky’s uncle than to Corky himself. Again, this is a surprise—at fifty-one years of age and “of extremely uncertain temper,” Mr. Worple is hardly a romantic figure (10-11).

In the next episode (“Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest”), Wooster is surprised by a friend of his aunt, Lady Malvern, who imposes on him to care for her son Wilmot while she gathers material for a book on prison conditions in America. Though Motty strikes Wooster as “a mild, furtive, sheepish sort of blighter . . . essentially a home bird” in his custody Wilmot goes wild (32, 33). After thoroughly enjoying the New York nightlife, Wilmot assaults a police officer and is thrown in jail. Coincidentally, this jail turns out to be the site of Lady Malvern’s research. Both these developments are the result of chance.

Similar events of chance occur in subsequent episodes. In “Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg,” Jeeves concocts a scheme to help Wooster’s friend Bickersteth convince his uncle that he is a successful businessman. This scheme backfires when the uncle cuts off his nephew’s allowance. In “The Aunt and the Sluggard,” Jeeves volunteers to liven up the aunt of another friend, Rocky Todd, with his accounts of the New York nightlife. The unintended consequence of this act of charity is that Rocky’s aunt shows up in person to be escorted around town. It is a statement of fact that actions in Jeeves and Wooster stories have unintended consequences. These unintended consequences are the result of chance.

Like Jeeves and Wooster, Reggie Pepper also experiences dynamic chance—random events in his four stories routinely affect the development of the respective plots. In “Absent Treatment,” Reggie is invited to dinner by an old friend only to find that he’s intruding upon a wedding anniversary celebration, thereby becoming entangled in his friend’s relationship troubles. In “Helping Freddie,” while looking for a lost child, Reggie picks up the son of a family friend, and finds himself obliged to babysit for a week. In “Rallying Around Old George,” his friend believes himself to have

drunkenly assaulted the Prince of Saxburg-Leignitz only to later find that he defended him from a mugger. Consequently, Reggie spends the whole of the story helping his friend to hide from someone who is trying to give him a reward. Finally, in "Doing Clarence a Bit of Good," Reggie's careless mention of a nearby theft inspires his host to fake the theft of a painting he hates but is too polite to take down, as it was a gift from his father. Like the stories of Jeeves and Wooster, those of Reggie Pepper also feature dynamic chance.

Dynamic chance drives the plots of P. G. Wodehouse through the introduction of unprecedented events, events for which the expositions of the respective stories have not prepared the reader. Nowhere in the exposition of The White Feather is there a hint that the town outside Wrykyn is home to a world champion boxer willing to take on pupils, just as nothing in the exposition of Psmith in the City suggests that Mike and Psmith's respective fathers plan to pull their sons out of two different universities and place them both in the New Asiatic Bank. Furthermore, the events of the various episodes of My Man, Jeeves involve the protagonists (in half the episodes, Jeeves and Wooster, and in the other half, Reggie Pepper) reacting to circumstances of which they had no prior knowledge, circumstances which invariably result in unpredictable consequences.

Chapter VIII-Conclusion

My thesis describes how authors representative of both the serious and comic genres of this transitional period of British literature (1885–1915) incorporate chance into their novels. Using the texts in question, I have assembled a body of evidence that suggests serious authors, unlike comic authors, are unwilling to allow acts of chance to dictate the behavior of their characters. I believe my thesis is important in that it can serve as a convenient launching pad for future literary criticism.

For example, I believe that one of the more interesting issues discussed in this thesis is the concept of Victorian will as it relates to chance in literature. In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that serious authors in the transitional period of British literature may have avoided meaningful chance so that readers would believe that their characters had free will. But before someone can make this argument, one must first have established that these serious authors *do* restrict chance in their novels. Likewise, any speculation as to why different genres of literature in this period and region deal differently with chance requires first that someone have established that these differences do exist.

Other critics have discussed the role of chance within a specific novel or within multiple novels by a particular author. There are many examples of this kind of literary criticism. In fact, I've cited two such in my thesis (Robert Kelly's "Accident and Purpose" and Dale Kramer's Forms of Tragedy). One could argue that someone

interested in the way that different genres of British literature deal with chance could simply examine several more specific studies to get the overall picture.

I disagree with this argument. Though the elements of my thesis may not be novel, the synthesis is unique. Each separately published study of chance has a particular slant. Kelly's article, for example, examines Lawrence's novels for apparent accidents in order to establish that they are conscious stylistic decisions rather than mistakes. In contrast, Kramer's book downplays chance in Hardy's novels in order to emphasize elements of fate that typically accompany tragedy. My thesis eliminates the confusion that these differences in theme might create by treating all the authors and novels in a uniform manner.

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