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THE USES OF
CASUALTY AND COINCIDENCE
IN THE
NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of English
University of Saskatchewan

by

Iris Alice White
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
January, 1969

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SYNOPSIS

Many critics, especially the earlier ones, assumed that Hardy employs accident and coincidence in his novels either to add excitement by touches of melodrama as was done by many popular novelists of the Victorian era, or else to suggest intervention in human affairs by a power beyond man's control which determines the pattern of each life. This thesis attempts to explore these views, and by examining Hardy's use of coincidence and accident, first in his ballads and short stories, then in the minor novels and finally in the major ones, to discover if Hardy were propounding a philosophic system or if another purpose lies behind the numerous coincidences to be found in his novels.

It finds that Hardy was profoundly influenced by ballad techniques and local narrative forms which rely heavily on coincidence. Hardy uses coincidence to inject melodramatic incidents into his novels for the sake of extra liveliness; he uses it to emphasize certain incidents by giving them symbolic significance and he also uses it to hasten to its conclusion a chain of events which, without the coincidence would reach the same conclusion but over a longer period of time.
This use of coincidence is a technical device since, although it is used to intensify atmosphere and hasten inevitable endings, it never changes the course of a logically developing sequence of events. It is not used as evidence of forces which work either consciously or unconsciously against the affairs of men. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy's final novel, accident and coincidence play no part in the unfolding of the plot, and the tragic climax is clearly shown to result from the forces of society.
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1. CRITICAL VIEWS OF HARDY'S USE OF 
COINCIDENCE AND ACCIDENT

In order to consider the uses that Thomas Hardy makes of coincidence and accident in his novels it is necessary first to define the two terms. Hardy speaks in his poem, "The Convergence of the Twain," of the Titanic and the iceberg following "paths coincident." He obviously considers the collision between the two as a coincidence. The American College Dictionary defines coincidence as "a striking occurrence of two or more events at one time apparently by mere chance." We might define coincidence, then, as a coming together of persons or things in violation of probability, and in a manner or at a time which is illogical and cannot be anticipated.

Casualty might be equated with accident—an unfortunate chance happening, taking place "in the casual, undirected, haphazard course of events." However, there is about an accident an element of logic that is not

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evident in coincidence and the accident may or may not involve a coming together. So that since the iceberg and the Titanic start their journeys thousands of miles apart and there is no contact between them as they travel, it must be due to coincidence that they both arrive at the same point at the same time. When Tess collides with the mail coach and her horse is killed, this is accident, for the mail coach runs regularly and Tess might be expected to meet it. This collision differs from that between the ship and the iceberg in that it can be explained logically and could have been averted. It does not violate probability.

Hardy makes various uses of coincidence and accident in his novels, and critics have held differing views of his purpose in the use he makes of these devices.

Desmond Hawkins considers Hardy's numerous coincidences as "injections of melodrama designed to infuse some extra liveliness."4 Joseph Warren Beach tells us that Hardy "often out-Herods Herod" and sees his use of coincidence as "the crisscross of circumstances that come to upset the plans and betray the best intentions of the characters."5

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Frank Chapman, after telling us that Hardy has to resort to a long chain of improbable coincidences to point his moral and bring about his tragic climax, suggests that certain of these coincidences carry symbolic significance. The appearance of Father Time, Jude's first encounter with Arabella, the bloodstained paper which Tess sees on her way to the rectory are among these symbolic coincidences. John Holloway's views are similar to Chapman's. Besides speaking of Hardy's "wild impossibilities," he gives examples of "incidents which do not advance the story but illustrate its significance more or less symbolically." The examples which he gives: the two amorous pigeons who singe themselves in the woodman's fire when Grace and Fitzpiers are loitering there; the cock which crows in the afternoon of Tess's wedding day; the heron which Mrs. Yeobright sees after her futile visit to Clym's cottage just before her death, although different from those given by Chapman, are still similar enough for it to appear that both critics are speaking of the same kind of unexpected or apparently unlikely incidents and appearances. Hardy's symbolism is rarely

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very subtle but, as Chapman suggests, where it is implicit and not too deliberately pointed out, it can be most effective. Such coincidences as those listed by Chapman and Holloway, although perhaps unlikely to occur in real life as Hardy employs them, are still just credible and do emphasize certain aspects of character or plot.

Albert Pettigrew Elliot see Hardy using "Chance and Coincidence" as part of the artistic motif "Fate" which Elliot believes is a dominant quality in Hardy's novels. Elliot feels that Nature, Time, Woman and Convention are also used like Chance and Coincidence to reveal Fate as a motivating force in the novels. George S. Fayen considers the numerous chains of events in The Woodlanders as resulting from coincidence since "even the smallest, seeming inconsequential act may indicate a series of events which become causes," while H. C. Duffin sees

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coincidence as "giving the action a push or a twist," the "why" a story happens.

It would seem reasonable, then, to include in a study of coincidence an examination of any incident which appears unmotivated or melodramatic, that is, injected for the sake of extra liveliness; any illogical incident which bears symbolic overtones; any incident which suspends— or appears to suspend— natural law; as well as a consideration of whether Hardy's use of accidental happenings implies that they are undirected, resulting from pure chance or not.

Most critics who discuss coincidence in Hardy's novels have a theory to account for its use and often fit this theory into a wider view of Hardy's work. Writers such as Q. D. Leavis and Albert J. Guerard have attempted to analyse these views and trace changing patterns in the general critical attitude towards Hardy. Leavis divides critics into three groups: first, Hardy's contemporaries to whom Hardy was a good but not distinguished Victorian novelist; second, the critics such as Lionel Johnson (1892) and Lascelles Abercrombie (1912) who saw him "as a

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beautiful writer about rural England and as a creator of Sophoclean tragedy";\(^{12}\) and third, the "modern" critics (Leavis was writing in 1943) such as Edmund Blunden, who finds several weaknesses in Hardy's work and gives "a more sober note of admiration to the Hardy novels."\(^{13}\) Leavis, writing as a modern critic, agrees with the Victorians about Hardy's awkward style and his "imperfect relation between the moral feeling and the fable he found for employing it;"\(^{14}\) she doubts "the Aeschylean intention and Sophoclean unity and grandeur"\(^{15}\) which, she indicates, Hardy himself felt was in his novels. By 1943 Albert J. Guerard\(^{16}\) was suggesting that a revaluation of Hardy was in order. He believes that too many books on Hardy are vitiated by hardened pre-conceptions about fatalism and pessimism and insists that we must begin by recognizing that "Hardy was pre-eminently a traditional teller of tales, and a great poet who stumbled upon the art of fiction and practiced it very waywardly."\(^{17}\) He speaks of the "post-Victorians" (a term which he uses with regard to the spirit of their publications) from Lionel Johnson to Lord David Cecil

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 234.  
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 235.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 234.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 235.  
\(^{16}\) Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy (2nd ed., Norfolk, Conn.: James Laughlin, 1964).  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 1.
(1946) who "assumed that realism was the proper medium of fiction—and that to see a preponderance of evil and brute chance in life was to be unrealistic." These critics were, Guerard is convinced, determined to look on the sweeter side of things, and they were made uneasy by Hardy's "use of melodramas, by his occasional later 'nastiness,' by his grotesque and macabre deviations from the placid reality they saw." Hardy's deliberate anti-realism, (his juxtaposition of implausible incident and plausible human character) appeared to the post-Victorians as "a perverse continuation of the Victorian sensation novel." Guerard uses the term "sensation novel" to describe the melodramatic novels of the type written by Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Dickens which were very popular with the reading public during the Victorian era.

To Guerard, Hardy's extreme coincidences, in the best novels at least, are "highly convincing foreshortenings of the actual and absurd world." He points out that today we are attracted by much that made the post-Victorians uneasy: "the inventiveness and improbability, the symbolic use of reappearance and coincidence, the

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18 Ibid., 2.  
19 Ibid., p. 3.  
20 Ibid., 3.  
21 Ibid., p. 3.
wanderings of a macabre imagination, the suggestions of supernatural agency: the frank acknowledgement that love is basically sexual and marriage usually unhappy; the demons of plot, irony and myth."  

James F. Scott agrees with this view, pointing out that today "time honoured statements, deprecating the sensational and melodramatic elements in his [Hardy's] works have come to seem stale and shopworn, lacking penetration."  

Today we are more ready to accept sensationalism in fiction, perhaps because it reflects the violence and melodrama of the world around us, and we are forced to agree with Guérard that in much early criticism Hardy the thinker has overwhelmed Hardy the story teller. Many of the earlier critics believed that Hardy introduced so much melodrama into his novels simply because melodrama especially in the serial form was popular with the reading public and Hardy wanted his novels to sell. That Hardy was conscious of the demands of the serial-reading public and willing to accede to it is shown by alterations which he made in certain novels, adding a happy ending for Thomasin and Diggory Venn in The Return of the Native,

22 Ibid., p. 6.

omitting certain episodes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; and in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* "aiming to get an incident into almost every week's part [which caused] him in his own judgement to add events somewhat too freely."24 Nearly always changes that Hardy made in order to please magazine editors were afterwards changed back to the original form for book publication.

J. I. M. Stewart attempts to explain "the oddly ironic situations organized upon a basis of coincidence and intricate accident"25 as resulting from Hardy's need to use melodrama in order to write popular serials, but he is puzzled because "we find the same elements again in his verse where he was certainly uninfluenced by consideration of vulgar appeal."26

It seems that the popularity of the melodramatic novel and the demands of serial publication played a part, especially at the beginning of Hardy's career in creating the over-abundance of amazing and exciting incidents depending on coincidence which occur at intervals throughout Hardy's novels. But three difficulties prevent us from


26Ibid., p. 24.
accepting public demand as the sole reason for Hardy's use of coincidence: the melodramatic elements in his verse, his retention of the amazing incidents in book publication and his continuing use of the same device when he was an established novelist and could have discarded it had he wished, and as he did do in Jude the Obscure.

Many critics have seized upon one aspect of the coincidences and feel that Hardy "senses and, in an endeavour to bring it home to the reader, exaggerates, the factor of chance in life."\textsuperscript{27} They point out that if Hardy believed us to be at the mercy of blind chance, he should show good fortune in his novels coming as frequently as bad. These critics feel that Hardy's emphasis on tragic accident and on coincidences which lead to unhappiness shows that his view of life was coloured by pessimism, although Hardy argues strongly, even bitterly, against critics calling his books pessimistic. Arthur McDowell writing of The Woodlanders describes Giles as "doomed to ill-luck" and says that "we feel that the scales are weighed for calamity."\textsuperscript{28} Mark Longaker and Edwin C.

\textsuperscript{27}Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist (New York: A. A. Kopf, 1928), p. 85.

\textsuperscript{28}Arthur McDowell, Thomas Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1931), p. 77.
Bolles see that Jude, Tess and Eustacia "with the author's manipulation of circumstances, all controlled by the forces of ill, . . . have small chance to overcome the obstacles which confront them."\(^{29}\) Hardy himself speaks of Jude as "born to ache a good deal."\(^{30}\)

Critics have tried with little success to discover from Hardy's poetry his attitude towards coincidence; whether he believes it to be the product of blind chance or a malign fate. By contrasting one of the early poems with a later one it is possible to claim that Hardy's views changed with time. For example, Baker tells us: "In 'Hap', the poem written in 1866, the universe is contemplated as the sport of chance; in The Dynasts, forty years later, it is a complete system of determinism."\(^{31}\) However, many poems appear to contradict one another and even in The Dynasts there is the suggestion that man can, at least part of the time, influence his destiny. Elliot agrees with Baker and applies his theory to the novels, carrying it a stage further. "To Hardy, Fate is a force


external to Man"\textsuperscript{32} and Chance and Coincidence, being the first of its tools to mature in his mind, are most often noticed in his early works. Elliot goes on, "In novels of his late life, coincidences are allied with a unity of purpose which persuades us that they are not only parts of a determined system but parts of a system determined for evil."\textsuperscript{33}

Roy Morrel, however, draws different conclusions from the poems. He points out that "dry finality is quite foreign to Hardy whose verse takes nothing for granted. He searches and doubts and questions, striving to find some other possible answer. This is so, perhaps. But why? Must it be always so? What margin was there, or may still exist, for free and different action?"\textsuperscript{34}

Southworth\textsuperscript{35} sees Hardy as exploiting in his poetry the many different roles that Chance plays in man's life and urging the need to achieve objectivity towards the world. Perhaps this theory could be applied to the novels. But Southworth also admits the difficulty of presenting even


\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 58.


the sum of Hardy's impressions. It is true that Hardy
asks questions and forces his readers to question. He
does not answer the questions but then he does not claim
to be able to do so. His poems, he says, are merely
impressions. He tries various ideas as they occur to him
to explain the unhappiness that he sees occurring in all
lives, but in none of his poems, not even in The Dynasts,
does he come to a final conclusion. It is not possible to
make from his poems any final judgement of Hardy's belief
regarding the significance of coincidence.

Some critics find in the unfortunate coincidences
and chance happenings throughout the novels, as well as in
the references to malevolent powers ruling the universe,
support for the theory that Hardy was propounding a
developed philosophy of life. Ernest Brennecke, in his
Thomas Hardy's Universe, which he subtitiles "a study of
a poet's mind," attempts to prove similarities in outlook
and attitude between Hardy and the nineteenth century
German philosopher, Schopenhauer, although Brennecke admits
that "it is perfectly believable that the broad outlines of
his philosophy and the rather vague and less sharply defined
terms in which he had presented it up to that time [1874]
were developed in complete independence of the writings
of Schopenhauer." 36

36 Ernest Brennecke, Thomas Hardy's Universe
As early as 1917, W. G. Courtney, writing of Hardy's relation to Aeschylus, believed that "Mr. Hardy's is a fatalistic creed, based on a philosophical Nescience, a scientific belief that the Power at the back of things is a blind, purposeless agency, to which we must be careful not to assign human or moral attributes." Critics a decade later also saw Hardy as accepting the Greek view of tragedy. Apollo P. D. Valakis saw Hardy's idea of Destiny as "a terrible unknown" being, "akin to the Moira of the Greeks," although he considered Hardy "a scientific agnostic of the modern type."

So we can view Hardy's use of coincidence, according to the earlier critics, in one of three ways: as stemming from a need to introduce thrilling incidents into his serialized novels; as due to his pessimistic outlook which caused him to see unfortunate accidents propelling his characters towards disaster; or as coming from an ordered philosophy of life based on ideas as far apart in time as Greek tragedy and nineteenth century philosophy. However, there are objections to each of these views. Hardy seemed to enjoy using coincidence since he used it not

37 W. L. Courtney, "Mr. Thomas Hardy and Aeschylus," The Fortnightly Review (March, 1917), CI No. 603, p. 630.
only in novels but in short stories and poems where there was no question of demand by serial readers; Hardy himself claimed to be a meliorist, seeking a way to the Better by a full look at the Worst, and was indignant at the pessimist label; it is doubtful if Hardy had ever read Schopenhauer and von Hartmann before critics mentioned that his view of life was similar to these philosophers. Cornelius Weygandt sees Hardy's pessimism as merely a "Novembry cast of mind" and he himself as "too thoroughly English" to owe much to German thought, and concludes sensibly, "His stories and verses are as wholly his as ever were any man's."39

Having dismissed the earlier critics' views of Hardy's use of coincidence, let us examine in more detail the views of those critics who see Hardy's way of writing as rooted in the tradition in which he was born, and see him, as Guerard does, as a teller of tales rather than someone attempting to convey a message or a philosophy. If we examine Hardy's upbringing in rural Dorset, consider the ballads dealing with dramatic, often tragic local legends which he must have heard and the links with the historic past which surrounded him, we may agree that it

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40 Ibid., p. 214.
was from these sources that he drew much of the raw material for his literary work, and his "Novembry" cast of mind coloured his interpretation of it.
2. HARDY THE TRADITIONALIST

Hardy used coincidence and accident in nearly everything he wrote, whether poetry, short story or novel. He was interested in coincidence and in the strange and bizarre occurrence. He collected unusual anecdotes and wrote them down in his diary. Among these queer stories which various people told him and of which he kept note was one of three wooden-legged men who used to dance a three-handed reel,1 another of a grave ordered and dug but never used,2 another of an excavation which yielded the body of a maid of honour to Catherine of Aragon, and whose glistening neck and bosom were coated with a species of enamel.3 These and many other such bizarre incidents together with old country traditions such as penance for wrong doing being performed openly in church,4 he recorded to provide him with the germ of a plot for a short story, ballad or novel.

Hardy's interest in such events and his use of them should not seem strange. He grew up in a tradition of folk tale and ballad. Fiction was a tale to be told

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2 Ibid., p. 252.
3 Ibid., p. 239.
4 Ibid., p. 237.
or a ballad to be sung. In his Life we read that his mother "had been a woman with an extraordinary store of local memories, reaching back to the days when the ancient ballads were everywhere heard at country feasts, in weaving shops and at spinning wheels." His father sang ballads and played the fiddle while he himself followed the family tradition with an interest in such music. It is no wonder that, as Mark Van Doren says, "Hardy's stories are little melodramas, sensational, unrelenting, and if need be mournful beyond bearing, as the great ballads are."  

A critic with a real understanding of Hardy, Donald Davidson, explains that Hardy sought to please, entertain, perhaps instruct but "he wrote like a creator of tales and poems who is a little embarrassed at having to adapt the creation of tales and poems to the condition of a written or printed literature and yet tries to do his faithful best under regrettable circumstances." Davidson clearly considers Hardy as "a teller of tales" rather than a thinker or philosopher. He goes on to say that Hardy approaches his tale telling and poem making "as if three centuries of

5 Ibid., p. 321.
Renaissance effort had worked only upon the outward form of tale and poem without changing its essential character. He wrote as a ballad maker would write if a ballad maker were to have to write novels; or as a bardic or epic poet would write if faced with the necessity of performing in the quasi-lyrical but non-singable strains of the nineteenth century and later. \(^8\)

Hardy himself reinforces this view from his notes which are quoted in his Life. He sees the writer's problem as "how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest and on the other to give reality." Hardy concludes that "human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the character." \(^9\) In this view, Hardy the romantic and Arnold Bennett the realist are completely in agreement. Bennett tells us "the whole modern tendency of realistic fiction is against oddness in a prominent figure"; and again of his choice of a heroine: "I knew that I must choose the sort of woman who would pass unnoticed in a crowd." \(^10\)

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 45. \(^9\)Ibid., p. 150. 
The traditional folk tales, like the ballads, abound in improbable, unpredictable events. The ghostly apparition; the physical mark resulting from mental or moral stress; the strange visitor from the infernal regions, or less frequently, from celestial ones; the hero or heroine who, after a long sleep or disappearance must take up life again in a foreign world, have all been transferred from folk tale to romance. In Britain such writers as Sir Walter Scott and Harrison Ainsworth had used the folk tale and legend against an historical background; in America, Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne had done the same. Writers as different as Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain had felt their influence. Growing up as he did in rural Dorset, Hardy must have felt the impact of the tradition around him as Scott did that of the Border country or Ainsworth that of the great royal palaces such as the Tower of London, Windsor Castle and Hampton Court.

Although only two of Hardy's works, The Trumpet Major and The Dynasts, may be considered truly historical in that they deal with definite historical events, the countryside which he presents is not the countryside of the Dorset labourer of his own day. As Stewart says, "Wessex is an older world than that of the Late Victorians;
to step into it is to step into an otherwise vanished England. It can be viewed as a world before the Fall, before that second expulsion from Paradise which science has decreed. Certainly it is pre-Darwinian country.\textsuperscript{11} The impressions of the past surrounded Hardy—the Roman roads, the Gothic churches, the harbours which had prepared for invasion by Napoleon and Phillip II of Spain. It is not so much that he writes of the past as that the past with its primitive ideas, its superstitions, folkways and folklore, thrusts itself into his present. There is a timelessness about Wessex, a sense of tradition, so that against this background legends whispered of ghostly coaches, of men selling their wives, of mysterious deaths seem in keeping. As John Erskine writes, "Such plots as these are not probable; neither is the plot of The Merchant of Venice. But Hardy clothes the melodrama with flesh and blood so passionate that the stories take us by storm; they may not be generally true but we know that they happened at least once."\textsuperscript{12} Hardy appears to


\textsuperscript{12}John Erskine, supplementary chapter on the literature 1892-1922, ed. Edmund Gosse, English Literature (New York: Macmillan, 1923), IV, p. 376A.
aim at the same thing as another novelist of the same period, who also told strange stories. It is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who says on the first page of The Poison Belt, "The event itself will always be marvellous, but the circumstances . . . of this extraordinary episode came about in the most natural and, indeed, inevitable fashion."\textsuperscript{13}

That Hardy would be steeped in a tradition that inclined him to the use of coincidence must be conceded. That it would tend to be tragic coincidence is more debatable but still likely, since ballads and country legends so frequently deal with unhappy events. But we are still left with the question of why and how he used this coincidence. Lloyd Fernando is helpful here, although he is writing only about The Return of the Native. He sees a technical reason for Hardy's use of coincidence. He believes that Hardy proceeds by means of "formal, nearly static poses"\textsuperscript{14} such as the portrait of Eustacia Vye in the chapter entitled, "Queen of the Night." He explains, "In the few places where the exigences of the narrative cannot be put off any longer, the pressure upon the author


\textsuperscript{14}Lloyd Fernando, "Thomas Hardy's Rhetoric," Review of English Literature (October, 1935), VI, p. 70.
forces him to the expediency of hasty, ill-disguised contrivance of plot.\footnote{Ibid., p. 70.} Hardy's technique in \textit{The Dynasts} has often been likened to that of the camera, and Fernando seems to be suggesting that Hardy in \textit{The Return of the Native} was using the somewhat clumsy technique seen in early films in which the story is jerked from close-up to close-up. Fernando contends that the circumstantial detail is of the most obvious kind and quotes as an example the incident in which Eustacia's grandfather decides not to disturb her rest and so does not give her the letter which, it seems, might have averted the whole tragedy. Fernando comments, flippantly, "Of course, she does not get it, and this enables Hardy to move on to his next tableau, which, as it happens, turns out to be Eustacia, back again on top of Rainbarrow."\footnote{Ibid., p. 70.}

Fernando's view that Hardy uses coincidence as a technical device to get things moving between his stills is interesting and leads to further conjecture. This technique is that of the early ballads where often a section of description or chorus is followed by a passage,
usually dialogue, which carries the story further. "Thomas Rhymer," "John of Hazelgreen" and "The Two Sisters" are examples of ballads of this type. Hardy's use of this technique can easily be seen in those of his poems which are akin to the early ballads. "The Trampwoman's Tragedy" is a good example of one of these ballad imitations.

The poem begins with a four stanza description of the four travellers: Mother Lee and Jeering John, the speaker and her fancy-man. Then, briefly, we are told of the speaker teasing the fancy-man "in play and wanton idleness." Another descriptive stanza and we get a dramatic scene of vivid action. This is certainly not a "still" but an easily visualized picture with movement and dialogue. The speaker sits next to John "to show that he had wooed and won." The next two stanzas continue the action. We watch the jealous fancy-man question his sweetheart about their coming child; she "still to tease" nods that it is Johnny's. The fancy-man, believing her lie, ends John's

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18 Ibid., p. 143.
19 Ibid., p. 161.
life by stabbing him. Indirectly, as "the taverns tell
the gloomy tale" we are told of the young man's hanging,
and then briefly, in one stanza, of the speaker's lone-
liness, of her "dead-born child," of Mother Lee's death.
In the last two stanzas we hear of the fancy-man's ghost,
who comes to question the trampwoman again, this time to
learn the truth.

What we have here is the bare bones of a local
legend retold in ballad form and with references to local
places like "Windwhistle Inn," "Marshal's Elm," "Ivelchester
(or Ilchester) jail." People well-known in local history,
for example "Blue Jimmy," a notorious horse thief, are
also mentioned. The language is simple, matter of fact,
and the amazing events are treated almost casually. The
action is recounted in few words; "He let out jeering
Johnny's life," "my sweetheart swung," "I dropt my dead-
born child." There are few details. The motivation is
very slight. What sets the whole tragedy in motion is
merely the trampwoman's boredom, her "wanton idleness."

Clearly coincidence is here a technical device.
Without the sudden, reckless, almost motiveless actions--
in the fancy-man's case, not motiveless, perhaps, but
certainly impulsive--the death of Mother Lee to intensify
the trampwoman's misfortune and the feeling of a malign
fate, the supernatural return of the lover, the plot would
take much, much longer to unfold and have no satisfactory conclusion. A critic such as Fernando might see this story as proceeding in jerks from one insufficiently motivated occurrence to the next. There would be truth in this criticism, but what we have here is not a fully-developed novel; it is the outline for one, with a single episode high-lighted dramatically.

In other poems besides his ballads Hardy uses coincidence to compress a great deal of life into a small space. His *Collected Poems* include a section called "Satires of Circumstance."\(^{21}\) Here are fifteen poems, most of them quite short, each containing the epitome of certain lives. For example, "At the Draper's"\(^{22}\) tells of a wife buying widow's mourning while her husband still lives. It is certainly a coincidence that he should enter a store selling women's garments at the very moment when his wife is indulging her macabre fancy—she might have been expected to make sure that he was safely occupied elsewhere. Yet the short poem, sixteen lines only, has so much implied in the brief dialogue between husband and wife that we see the whole of their tragic relationship laid bare and do not question the likeliness of the occurrence nor the technique, which like a miniature painting has compressed

so much into so small a space without losing vitality.

Another dialogue, this time "In the Room of the Bride-elect,"\(^2^3\) between the bride-to-be and her mother, shows in thirteen lines, the spoilt childhood and future unhappy married life of the girl who reproaches her mother because she and her father had not "stood out strong" against her wish to marry this dolt "with his button-hole rose." Two prospective bridegrooms tell in monologues of surprising events which changed their lives. One,\(^2^4\) returning to the house to get his walking-stick, forgotten after his visit, hears the "vixen voice" of his chosen one berating her mother. "He steals off leaving his stick unclaimed" and thankful that this chance happening has proved to him that his "precious porcelain" is only delf. The other is a farmer and is actually "At the Altar-rail\(^2^5\) when he receives a letter from the woman he had expected to marry but who has decided that "a swift short gay life" suits her best.

Each of these poems records an unlikely incident and at the same time reflects a much wider picture of an individual life. By using coincidence Hardy has been able

\(^2^3\)Ibid., p. 392.
\(^2^4\)Ibid., "Outside the Window," p. 394.
\(^2^5\)Ibid., p. 395.
to compress into a single incident what would have otherwise taken much longer to relate. The unlikely incident which he shows us exaggerates a characteristic—wilfulness, shrewishness, love of gaiety. It is as though part of a picture were painted in brighter colours than the rest in order to draw attention to it.

Hardy's short stories have the same ballad qualities that we recognize in many of his poems. Each seems meant to be told rather than read; many evoke a sense of wonder, some even of awe. These stories are full of strange, even grotesque happenings, yet they are narrated with a simplicity which appears to assume and demand naive belief. Douglas Brown sums up this contrast between style and plot when he says, "There is the easy alliance of the grotesque and disproportionate with the substantial and natural, and the unselfconscious boldness with which they are offered." 26 The characters do not change; the concentration is on the action, usually on a single situation. Frequently the stories are tragic. A character will have spent years trying to achieve a certain objective which he feels will bring him happiness, only to have it escape him for ever

at the last moment. Often, with the best of intentions, a character will act in such a way as to destroy all his hopes for future happiness. Yet, as in the poems, these strange incidents, these irrational actions, serve to intensify the irony and the tragedy, to compress the events covering a long period of time into the scope of a short story.

In one of these stories, "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," we see Joshua and Cornelius Halborough grow from youth to middle age, and their sister, Rosa, from childhood to motherhood. Their father, a drunken millwright, thwarts on every occasion his sons' ambition to enter the church and "rise." He reappears from Canada just before Rosa's engagement to the young squire is to be announced and seems likely to ruin her prospects for a happy married life. On his way to see his daughter when drunk, he falls into a stream. The brothers see him fall but hesitate before attempting to drag him to the bank and he is sucked into a culvert and drowned. Joshua thrusts his father's walking-stick into the mud among the sedge. The body, when found, is unidentifiable but the brothers are now suffering from gnawing conscience as they had previously done from gnawing ambition. The

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walking-stick, a rough one cut from a hedge, takes root and puts out leaves, a symbolic contrast to the brothers' withering lives, as they contemplate suicide to prevent the possibility of their sister discovering that their father had died as a result of their inaction.

This story is typical of Hardy in the long period of time covered, in the discursive style, in the ironic contrast between the brothers' praise of Christian humility and their own fierce pride and in the use of simple symbolism. Many of the events seem to occur conveniently, with little to make us foresee them. The death of the mother; the father's absence in Canada; the attraction between Rosa and the squire (conveniently a widower); the return of the father; his imprisonment and release; the news of Joshua's illegitimacy are such events. Nevertheless they lead up to the moment when the brothers stand transfixed on the bank while their father flounders in the water. Certainly much of the story if analyzed carefully seems unrealistic, but the total effect is natural enough. We feel with Joshua and Cornelius as they strive to break through the web which seems to enmesh them and prevent them from achieving their two ambitions. As we read we are swept from incident to incident with sufficient force to prevent us questioning whether this or that could really happen as the author says that it does.
Even less realistic in detail than the story of the Halborough family, yet still making use of coincidence in the same way are stories such as "The Withered Arm" which deals with the power of unconscious witchcraft and a belief in the curative powers of the touch of a hanged man. The story opens with dairymaid Rhoda Brook hearing that Farmer Lodge, by whom she has a twelve-year-old son, is recently married to a pretty young wife, Gertrude. In a vivid dream Rhoda seizes Gertrude and whirls her by her left arm backward to the floor. From this time, Gertrude's arm withers and the young woman loses the grace and beauty which had attracted her husband. She tries various remedies and finally decides to follow the advice of Conjuror Trendle, who tells her that only the touch of the body of a hanged man will undo this work of an enemy. Gertrude does manage to touch the neck of a boy who has been hanged as an arsonist, although it was merely by chance that he was present when the ricks were fired. The shock of touching the dead body causes "the turn o' the blood" which the conjuror expects to cure the withered arm, but a second shock follows. Rhoda and Farmer Lodge are there to claim the body of their son. This second shock is too much for Gertrude, who dies

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three days later.

The story contains the element of superstition and the touch of the supernatural so often found in folktales. The action covers a period of six years, but the events narrated are selected carefully so that there are no superfluous details in the forty pages. Rhoda, fearing that she exercises a malignant power over people against her will, does not "reason on the freaks of coincidence,"\(^{29}\) which is the only explanation that the story suggests for her dream, perhaps wish, becoming reality.

In "Barbara of the House of Grebe"\(^{30}\) a woman develops a strong attachment to the statue of her previous husband, whose unusually good looks have been destroyed by fire a short while before his death. Barbara's present husband has the statue mutilated so that it resembles the disfigured man after the fire, and forces the sight of this statue on his wife. Thus she remembers her first husband after his disfigurement rather than before it. Barbara's obsession is destroyed; her devotion transferred to her second husband. Strange though the story is, it is psychologically convincing and Barbara's actions stem from her consistently weak character. She clings to her first husband, to his likeness,

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 81.

then to her second husband.

In his Preface to one of his volumes of short stories, Wessex Tales, Hardy mentions that "hanging matters used to form a large proportion of the local tradition" and that he knew an old woman who, in her youth had been taken to have her "blood turned" by a convict's corpse. He also explains that he had "an aged friend who knew Rhoda Brook." There is no doubt that Hardy often drew on the traditional tales of Dorset when he wished to write a story. He did not intend to recount everyday happenings in these tales which he describes as "dreams not records." In A Group of Noble Dames he speaks of his narrators telling about "those incidents whose relation has tended more distinctly to dramatize than eulogize their ancestors" and it is to pass on these dramatic tales of an earlier Wessex that he wrote many of his short stories which are full of strange happenings and coincidences and yet carry conviction because of a certain psychological soundness in the characters and simplicity in the presentation.

31 Thomas Hardy, Wessex Tales, p. v.
32 Ibid., p. vi. 33 Ibid., p. vi.
34 Ibid., p. viii.
35 Thomas Hardy, Preface to A Group of Noble Dames, p. vi.
3. COINCIDENCE AND ACCIDENT IN THE MINOR NOVELS

We have seen that Hardy makes use of coincidence in his short stories and poems as the early balladeers did: to add excitement and surprise; to give symbolic overtones; to manipulate time. In his novels a similar use of coincidence and accident may be seen. The number of coincidences which he introduces varies from novel to novel but there is no steady decrease in its use such as we might expect if it were being used at first as a useful device by an inexperienced novelist who had difficulty in unravelling his plots. The Hand of Ethelberta (1876), an early novel, is almost free from dramatic surprises, but it is followed by The Return of the Native (1878) which contains more coincidence than any of Hardy's other novels. Hardy's last novel, Jude the Obscure (1895) has very little coincidence but it is preceded by The Well-Beloved (1892) in which the whole plot depends on the manipulation of time. There seems, therefore, little point in examining the novels in strict chronological order and attempting to trace a development in Hardy's use of coincidence and accident. It will prove easier to come to a decision about such devices if we can group the novels in some way and see certain patterns emerge.
Hardy's novels are frequently divided by critics as a matter of technical convenience into two groups: major and minor novels. "The big four": The Return of the Native (1878), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) and Jude the Obscure (1895) are nearly always considered major novels and some critics would argue that The Woodlanders\(^1\) and Far from the Madding Crowd\(^2\) should be included with them. However it is more convenient to consider these two novels with the minor ones, and for this reason, they are included with them here.

Some of these minor novels show a certain use of coincidence predominating in each. In Desperate Remedies\(^3\) Hardy uses it to add suspense; in The Well-Beloved\(^4\) and Two on a Tower\(^5\) he uses it to manipulate time, although

\(^1\) Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan, 1964); 1887.
\(^2\) Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd (London: Macmillan, 1966); 1874.
\(^3\) Thomas Hardy, Desperate Remedies (London: Macmillan, 1960); 1892.
\(^4\) Thomas Hardy, The Well-Beloved (London: Macmillan, 1960); 1892.
\(^5\) Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower (London: Macmillan, 1964); 1882.
in the latter it also has other uses. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Woodlanders* Hardy uses coincidence and accident with great skill and imagination for several purposes in each novel. As J. I. M. Stewart tells us, "He liked them [coincidences] just as he liked complicated graining or a good gargoyle" but although he enjoyed coincidence for its own sake, he never allows it to make a character appear psychologically unsound, and he very rarely displays what John Holloway calls "callow artistry," which Holloway describes as "some defect of presentation, some crudity or casualness in writing, which makes the improbable unconvincing, but would make the probable unconvincing, too." 

In *The Well-Beloved*, Hardy uses coincidence to manipulate time. This book, obviously a transition between the kind of tale Hardy used in his short stories, and his novels, tells of Jocelyn Pierston's meeting with his ideal girl at twenty, again at forty and again at sixty and shows "the migratory elusive idealization he called his Love [flit] from human shell to human shell an indefinite number of times." Hardy makes it seem as though

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time has been turned back for Jocelyn as the first Avice reappears twice, different in character each time, but the same in age and appearance. By coincidence, the three girls each named Avice are made to appear dwellers in the Faeryland visited by True Thomas where time moves very slowly; in contrast, Marcia, with whom Jocelyn ends his life, lives in the real world where beauty passes and old age comes to all.

Another novel in which Hardy shows his interest in time is Two on a Tower, but the book shows, in an immature form, the more complicated use of coincidence which we find in the later novels. Hardy tells us that he wrote the book with "high aims." This "slightly-built romance was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes, the smaller might be the greater to them as man." In order to emphasize the weakness of humanity and therefore the courage and dignity of its endeavour, Hardy has to show the odds weighed heavily against his characters. If good fortune resulted as often as bad from chance occurrences in the novel, he would not achieve the effect of

9Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower, p. v.
the impersonal stellar universe oblivious of the suffering of mankind.

When Viviette and Swithin first meet, her marriage and superior situation provide barriers between them. Then Viviette believes herself free, and although she is more than ten years older than Swithin, this age-gap is not yet obvious. Impulsively, they go through a secret marriage ceremony, but then Viviette discovers that her husband did not die until after her marriage to Swithin. Before she can tell Swithin of this complication, she learns from a letter seen by chance, that he has inherited six hundred pounds a year from an uncle on condition that he is unmarried at the age of twenty-six. This money would make it possible for Swithin to follow his studies in astronomy as he had always longed to do, and Viviette unselfishly insists that he do so. Viviette finds that she is pregnant and feels forced to accept the Bishop of Melchester who has proposed marriage to her. The Bishop dies; Swithin returns, knowing of Viviette's sacrifice. He no longer loves her and is shocked to see how old she looks. Hardy tells us that Time had at last brought about his revenges. However, Swithin wishes to deal with loving-kindness towards Viviette and he clasps her in his arms and tells her that he has come to marry her. The shock of joy is too much and she dies in his arms.
This novel abounds in coincidence and accident and each helps to make Viviette's position worse. However, Hardy makes it clear from the first that happiness is not possible for her. As the years pass, the difference in age between the lovers will grow more obvious. Hardy implies that Viviette, who has one marriage behind her, will watch her boy-husband's success from the sidelines, pretending an interest in astronomy for the sake of the astronomer. Time is certainly against the two. Their being separated and Viviette's suffering make this difference in age plain in a shortened space of time. Had they been together day by day the plot would take much longer to move to a point where Swithin realized Viviette's maturity contrasted with his own youth, and this climax would necessarily be less dramatic. By allowing Viviette to die in Swithin's arms, at the moment when she was most happy, Hardy has also given an ending in tone with the book. It is certainly not a happy conclusion, but it lacks the bitterness there would be in showing the unhappy, ageing Viviette tied by marriage to a resentful, still youthful Swithin. Another interesting coincidence of a completely different kind to those used to manipulate time or show the weakness of humanity against the blows of chance, is that of Viviette's hallucination. Shortly after Swithin leaves, Viviette imagines that she sees a small child,
but on approaching the spot sees only a tuft of yellow fern. This provides a delicate means of letting Viviette realize her pregnancy but it also has that slight touch of supernatural symbolism of which Hardy is so fond. The child when it is born has flaxen hair like the child Viviette had imagined herself seeing. This hallucination reveals too, the same psychological soundness that can be seen in the short stories. Viviette's subconscious mind may well have been more sensitive to her condition than her conscious one.

Duffin suggests that the plot of Desperate Remedies, pinned together as it is by coincidence and accidental happenings, would make a likely Crime Club "Book of the Month." In this early novel Hardy was doubtless attempting to write in the genre of such popular novelists as Wilkie Collins. As the intricate plot unravels we discover that Cytherea's employer is the lost love of Cytherea's father, while the villain, Manston, proves to be the employer's illegitimate son. Melodramatic incident follows melodramatic incident; a misread time table leads to complications, a fire ruins the hero, his betrothal is broken, Cytherea innocently goes through a marriage ceremony with Manston whose wife is still living, the hero arrives at the church too late. Yet, somehow, the situation is resolved; Cytherea and her true love are united.

in marriage. The plot is improbable but events move with such speed that questions of probability do not often arise.

There are suggestions, despite the many chance happenings, that man's fate is in his own hands. We are told that Manston would resist fate. Roy Morrell discusses the accident of fire breaking out at the Springrove farm, saying that Hardy's exact notes on the time carry an insistent message: "that at any time until the last few seconds a person alert to the danger could easily have prevented the houses catching fire." Springrove need not have allowed misfortune to overtake him. He could have renewed his insurance; he could have prevented the fire. The accident adds excitement but it does not suggest that the characters are puppets, nor is it difficult to accept in the rapidly moving events.

Hardy can usually make us accept the coincidences in his novels by the simplicity and naturalness with which he relates the happening and by the consistency of his characterization. In A Pair of Blue Eyes many of the accidents which bring misfortune on Elfride spring from her easily-swayed character. We believe in her change of

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mind after she elopes with Smith and so we accept the coincidence of her being seen by the Widow Jethway and the unfortunate results of this meeting at the station. However, at the end of the book there is a note which does not seem in accord.

Elfride's two erstwhile suitors decide individually to go down to Wessex to see her and attempt to heal the breach between them. The irony of having the two suitors, Smith and Knight, travel to visit Elfride on the same train as her body is travelling on to its burial has just the touch of the macabre which appeals to Hardy. But the episode seems artificial and lacks conviction. Perhaps this is because Paddington Station and a railway line lack the atmosphere of Wessex; perhaps because this tragic irony is out of keeping with the lighthearted early chapters of the book, when the charming young Elfride meets attractive Stephen Smith against the romantic background of the Wessex countryside. Whatever the cause, this conclusion seems an example of the "callow artistry" to which John Holloway refers. It is not that the final meeting at Elfride's tomb of the three who loved her is so impossible --Hardy makes us accept far greater improbabilities--but we have been taken in spirit from Wessex to the harsh realities of a London railway station, and this atmosphere

\[13\] Previously referred to on page 35.
surrounds the train also. We watch the scene from outside. The spell of Wessex is broken, and the reader feels that credibility is being strained.

Similar patterns can be seen if we compare the use of coincidence and accident in *Far from the Madding Crowd* with that of *The Woodlanders*. In each of these novels a girl of a somewhat superior social standing to the country folk around her, seems likely to marry an obviously worthy young countryman who loves her. A blow falls on each of the young men—Gabriel Oak, the shepherd in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, loses all of his flock as the result of the over-eagerness of his young dog to chase the sheep; Giles Winterborne, a woodlander in the apple and cider trade at Little Hintock, loses his houses when the death of John South causes the three life leases on which Giles's tenancy depends to expire. However, Hardy shows that in each case the misfortune which appears the result of coincidence, could have been prevented. Gabriel had called both his dogs but only the older had responded. Weary, the shepherd had gone to bed and left the younger dog loose. Hardy carefully points out that this animal loves to chase sheep and does this far too eagerly. We are also told that the sheep are uninsured. This is certainly not fate striking at Oak. It could be considered chance since the dog might have slept after its meal rather than have driven sheep. However the lack of insurance which
Hardy specifically mentions, seems due more to carelessness than to anything else, for there is no suggestion that Gabriel cannot afford the premium. Giles Winterborne's misfortune is similar. He neither studied the leases on which his holdings depended nor did he have suitable insurance. Again there is a suggestion of carelessness. These situations are similar to the Springrove fire.14 In all three cases the misfortune results less from chance than from a certain overconfidence, or a faith in providence. We are told of Springrove's sanguine temperament, that Giles, in spite of John South's indisposition, had not anticipated danger, that Gabriel believes there will be no further necessity for his attendance on the downs.

These misfortunes start the complications of the plot in each novel. Neither Gabriel nor Giles can now aspire to the heroine. Bathsheba Everdene and Grace Melbury are free to be wooed by others and, apparently by coincidence, these two others are provided from beyond the rural community; the gallant, dashing soldier, Francis Troy and the aristocratic doctor, Edred Fitzpiers. Each has a woman from his past who reappears in his life to disrupt his marriage with the heroine of the novel. Fitzpiers soon acquires a present mistress in Suke Damson

14Desperate Remedies, pp. 191-199.
and Troy's interest in Bathsheba's property is clearly as strong as his interest in herself. In neither case does there seem much likelihood that the wife will be happy.

The two heroines, skittish Bathsheba Everdene and gentle Grace Melbury, seem at first to have little in common but as we examine the accidents in the two novels we see, behind several of them, the reluctance of the girls to make a firm decision. Like the blue-eyed Elfride who left a decision to her horse and suffered exceedingly for it, Bathsheba leaves a decision to her hymn-book. She is writing a valentine for a child, Teddy Coggan, one Sunday evening, when her maid, Liddy, suggests that it would be fun to send the card to Farmer Boldwood instead. Bathsheba is tempted but attempts to shift the responsibility for a decision. She suggests they toss a coin, but then feels that tossing money on a Sunday would be tempting the devil indeed. Libby points out that tossing a hymnbook can have no sinfulness about it. Bathsheba agrees. Like Elfride, who decided that the horse would be most likely to return to its own stable and so linked what she felt she should do with what she believed that chance would indicate, Bathsheba attempts to influence the results of her chance decision. "'Very well, Open, Boldwood—shut, Teddy. No; it's more likely to fall open. Open, Teddy—shut, Boldwood.'
The book went fluttering in the air and came down shut."\textsuperscript{15}

The words which Marty scrawls on the side of Giles's house: "O Giles, you've lost your dwelling-place, /And therefore, Giles, you'll lose your Grace,"\textsuperscript{16} are altered so that the word "keep" replaces "lose." It seems as though Giles must see this, realize that Grace does not share her father's feeling about the unsuitability of a marriage between Giles and herself and that Giles, encouraged by the knowledge, must insist on the engagement continuing. However Giles does not see the alteration; Marty thinks some idle boy has altered it and erases the whole doggerel verse. Grace, so Hardy tells us, thinks, "Fate would have it his way, and there was nothing to do but acquiesce."\textsuperscript{17}

However there is really little "Fate" about the whole episode. Had Grace had a little more courage and determination she could have told Giles directly how she felt rather than taken such a haphazard way of doing so. She is determined to avoid taking any direct action.

In neither of these two cases is the chance result as important as it appears at first. It is true that Bathsheba, having sent Boldwood the valentine, has intensified

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{The Woodlanders}, p. 114.  
\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 115.
his interest in her, but this interest has already been aroused. We know this from his gazing at her in church. Hardy shows us in Boldwood a somewhat neurotic individual, a man who, having been jilted, has kept himself apart from social intercourse and whose reserve hides deep feelings. Hardy shows us in Bathsheba a beautiful, wilful girl whom even Oak has called vain, and who likes to see men conscious of her charm. It seems very likely that she will be provocative, that he will be strongly attracted. The hymnbook and valentine episode shows Boldwood becoming infatuated with Bathsheba and believing himself encouraged by her. Without this episode, the infatuation might have taken longer to reach full force, but there is an inevitability about the emotional instability which Bathsheba's proximity evokes in Boldwood. We feel that his reaction to her, while it might have taken longer had she not sent him the card with "marry me" on it, would have been the same in any event.

In Grace's case, her meekness of character and her father's determination to marry her to a man whom he considers more worthy of her, will certainly lead to her separation from Giles. It is hardly coincidence that Grace and Bathsheba fall like ripe fruit into the hands of Fitzpiers and Troy. Although it may seem at first a great coincidence that Fitzpiers and Troy appear just at the time when a girl is ready to be dazzled there is no
doubt that, with these two attractive and financially desirable young women so ready to fall in love, some handsome young stranger would arrive and be likely to loiter instead of passing on elsewhere. Neither Fitzpiers nor Troy has made up his mind to settle; Fitzpiers lacks patients, Troy expects that his regiment will be ordered elsewhere. It is the girl (and in Fitzpiers's case the eagerness of Grace's father) who keeps them from leaving, rather than coincidence. Had not these two particular strangers appeared and loitered, probably two others of similar character would have been tempted by the charms and money of Grace and Bathsheba, and brought the two girls the same measure of unhappiness as these husbands brought them.

The man-trap at the end of The Woodlanders serves to reunite Grace and Fitzpiers in a shorter space of time than would be necessary without this accident. In Far from the Madding Crowd the gossip about himself and Bathsheba, which causes Gabriel to decide to move away from her farm, has the same result as the man-trap, but uses a human agency rather than an accident.

Besides using coincidence to conclude a course of action in a shorter time than it would otherwise take, Hardy also uses it to create atmosphere, heighten irony and deepen impressions. A strange event which may merely
happen through coincidence or may have a deeper significance is the death of John South as soon as he realizes that the elm "of the same birth-year"\(^{18}\) as his has been cut down. It is, of course, a very old custom and one which is found in many parts of the world, to plant a tree on the birth of the oldest son in a family, and the suggestion that some mysterious link exists between such a man and his tree had obviously interested Hardy. By having South die when he sees that the tree is dead rather than at the moment when it falls, Hardy is avoiding any certainty of the life of the man and that of the tree being interwoven in some supernatural way, but is still evoking the unusual background of folk tale and legend which helps to give his creation of Wessex its strange atmosphere.

Another rural belief is used by Hardy when he shows the Midsummer eve attempt by the girls of Little and Great Hintock to gain a glimpse of their future partners for life. Since this rite sends Grace into Fitzpiers's arms it might seem at first as though Hardy had some faith in such rites. However, he shows the villagers giving considerable encouragement to fate on such an occasion. Grammer Oliver tells Marty "we ought to act the part o' Providence sometimes,"\(^{19}\) but despite Marty's help, Grammer's

\(^{18}\)The Woodlanders, p. 108. \(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 152.
plan, to have Grace rush into the arms of Giles, is thwarted by Mrs. Melbury who tells Fitzpiers where he should be most likely to catch Grace. Giles's reluctance to thrust himself upon Grace and Fitzpiers's willingness to do so bring the inevitable result. Hardy shows too much manipulation of the pairing for the reader to feel any superstitious awe about the result of the rite, but there is an added irony in the fact that besides catching his future wife, Fitzpiers also catches a future mistress, for it is on this occasion that Suke Damson challenges him to pursue her and is, as she intended to be, captured.

Examples of coincidence used to deepen impressions already formed by the reader can be easily found. Fanny's strange mistake over the church leaves us with the feeling that perhaps Troy's instructions were not too explicit. Perhaps he had a slight hope that Fanny would not arrive at the right church and that the marriage would not take place. We are left with the feeling, as Troy answers Fanny's "when shall it be?" with "God knows!" and walks rapidly away, that he feels reprieved and that the marriage will never take place, as indeed it never does.

Symbolism is employed in the episode in which a dog, met by chance, helps Fanny to reach Casterbridge Union.

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20 *Far from the Madding Crowd*, p. 133.
The dog is stoned away,\textsuperscript{21} and the animal's treatment points up the lack of kindness shown to the girl by her own kind; while the water which pours from the gargoyle onto Troy's carefully planted flowers,\textsuperscript{22} symbolizes and emphasizes the lateness and uselessness of his repentance.

In these two novels Hardy uses accident and coincidence in ways which are more various and imaginative than in the other minor novels. Time is shortened; \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd} covers about eight years, \textit{The Woodlanders} only about three. The different uses of chance and coincidence have been woven together so that interest is sustained, atmosphere created and ironic commentary deepened. From these most important of the minor works we now pass to a study of the use of casualty and coincidence in Hardy's major novels.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 130. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 351
4. ACCIDENT AND COINCIDENCE IN THE MAJOR NOVELS

Hardy uses coincidence in the first three of the major novels, *The Return of the Native*,¹ *The Mayor of Casterbridge*² and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*³ in much the same way as he does in *Far from the Madding Crowd*⁴ and *The Woodlanders*.⁵ In *Jude the Obscure*⁶ he uses it far less and somewhat differently.

Especially in *The Return of the Native* does Hardy use coincidence to enable him to show the result of a series of events taking place in a shortened space of time. He wrote⁷ that in this novel he attempted to keep the unities, although it is obvious that he does not succeed in unifying the action completely. In his other three major novels the unities are not kept. It may be because Hardy is trying to impose a set of artificial limitations upon the plot of

¹Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 1878.
²Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 1886.
³Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 1891.
⁴Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 1874.
⁵Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 1887.
⁶Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 1896.
⁷Thomas Hardy, quoted in *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, 1840-1928, p. 422.
his novel that more coincidence is introduced into the
*The Return of the Native* than is needed in the broader con­fines of the later tragedies, but it seems more likely that Hardy used coincidence to compress Eustacia's bitter destiny into the space of one year, while Tess must be shown to suf­fer and endure the harshness and vindictiveness of society for a lengthier time. In both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Jude the Obscure* there has to be a long enough period of time for the hero to suffer, to be brought to the point where he could write the bitter words of Henchard's will or voice the bitterness of Jude's curse. There is little need to hasten the climax in the way that it is hastened in *The Return of the Native*, where Eustacia, still in the fulness of her beauty and youth, curses what life has done to her and dies.

In each novel an accident starts the action moving. In *The Return of the Native* "a trifling irregularity in the [marriage] license," which makes us suspect that this groom, like Troy, is not anxious to be wed, prevents the marriage taking place between Thomasin Yeobright and Damon Wildeve. This is not important in itself, since they do marry later, but the incident reveals that neither is really in love with the other, and Thomasin's attitude takes from Wildeve the attraction he had held for Eustacia when she believed him coveted by someone else. Now all

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8Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 47.
Eustacia's hopes are set on the return of Clym Yeobright from Paris and her dream that in him she will find a great lover, one who will take her away from Egdon Heath and give her the glamorous life that she feels she deserves.

Eustacia and Clym are married but their hopes for the future conflict. Clym plans to found a school for farmers' sons on the heath, but Eustacia is dissatisfied and restless as ever. Ernest A. Baker tells us, "But the growing rift between husband and wife is not enough for Hardy; he accelerates the pace of events, and embitters the inevitable disaster with a series of accidents most of which would have had the odds against them in average life."9

However, Hardy is not writing about 'average life' and this series of accidents separates Eustacia from Clym and leads her on to disaster, accelerating the climax. Clym becomes almost blind from too much studying and decides to spend long hours cutting furze on his beloved heath for a livelihood. Because she feels herself degraded and neglected, Eustacia's old interest in Wildeve is revived when they meet again by chance. Mrs. Yeobright, attempting to heal the estrangement which her son's marriage has caused between them, arrives at his cottage when he

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is asleep and Wildeve talking with Eustacia. The exhausted woman knocks but is not admitted. On her way home, worn out by the long, hot journey, she is bitten by an adder and dies. Clym blames Eustacia, who, indignant at the criticism, leaves him for her grandfather's house. Here a bonfire lit to cheer her is seen by Wildeve, now the richer for an unexpected inheritance, who thinks it a signal meant for him. He promises to help Eustacia to escape from the heath, hoping that she will let him accompany her. Clym's letter to Eustacia asking her to return to him does not reach her.

The culmination of all this accident and chance is that all five of the remaining main characters are on the heath at midnight in November with a violent storm raging. Probably Eustacia mistakes the light of a gig for the window of Wildeve's inn and losing her way, wanders toward the river. J. I. M. Stewart, who has spoken of chance holding "another field-day through the action"\(^\text{10}\) says that Eustacia dies "through the incidence of mere chance,"\(^\text{11}\) although other critics have seen her death as suicide. Wildeve is drowned with Eustacia when he attempts to save her from being swept over the weir; Clym and Venn, who also go to the rescue, are saved.


\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 306.
The Return of the Native abounds in accident. Yet we feel that, throughout the novel, chance only serves to bring about in a year, tragedy which, although it might otherwise have taken a decade or more, was inevitable in any case. Eustacia and Clym could not be happy together: it is doubtful if either could be truly happy with their "ordinary human passions, prejudices and ambitions"¹² set against the opposing environment which Hardy creates.

Clym appears a more likely candidate for happiness than the ambitious, dissatisfied Eustacia, but he is a prey to conflicting loyalties. He wishes to be a local success for his mother's sake, to please his passionate, demanding wife whose one desire is for a brilliant social life, and to live an ascetic life on the lonely heath, serving mankind. Obviously he cannot reconcile all three. His blindness is one of Hardy's foreshortenings--ironic in that Clym is metaphorically blind to much around him. Yet, even without the re-entrance of Wildeve into Eustacia's life the difference in temperament between the "earlier masculine type of Sue Bridehead"¹³ and the sultry rebellious "Queen of Night"¹⁴ would doom their marriage

¹²Thomas Hardy, quoted in The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, p. 120.
¹⁴Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 73.
to failure. McCullough calls their union one of tragic incongruity and adds, "knowing from the beginning what each one desires, the reader can see the threatening implications in the circumstances drawing them together." 15

The motivating force in Eustacia's life is the desire to get away from the heath and live as a great lady with a husband who will complement her position. Accident appears to thwart her desire. The man who appears in her life, whom she loves and marries, is Clym Yeobright, a native of the Heath who loves it and wishes to work among its people. Yet had Clym not become blind, had he yielded to her wish and taken her to Paris, life there would fall short of her splendid imagining. She could not have achieved her desire in the circumstances that Hardy portrays.

One of the most interesting scenes in the novel is that of the dice game on the heath. This accident leads to the quarrel between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright and so sets in motion the course of events which leads to the tragedy. It also emphasizes the atmosphere of the heath. It could well be a scene from an early ballad.

Mrs. Yeobright has kept a hundred spade guineas in trust for Clym and Thomasin. She gives the money to Christian Cantle to give to Clym and his cousin at the

reception after Clym and Eustacia's wedding. McCullough comments, "Christian is a simpleton, whose folly makes him a fit instrument of tragedy. It is in keeping with the author's irony that far-reaching issues of life and happiness should hang for one evening upon such a slender reed." On his way to the reception Christian loses all the money to Wildeve in a game of dice; Venn then wins the money from Wildeve in another game and finally gives all of the money to Thomasin, not knowing that half of it had belonged to Clym. Hardy comments, "It was an error which afterwards helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done."

S. C. Chew feels that Hardy "wrings the last drop of improbability out of such a situation." He goes on: "The dicing scene . . . might have been worked out to the same conclusion and with the same bearing upon the course of events without such extraordinary fluctuations of fortune and especially without the last two throws. . . . Frankly it must be admitted that Hardy often follows his natural bent towards the mysterious and improbable to

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16 Ibid., pp. 241-2.
17 Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 242.
and improbable to the point where he over-reaches himself in the employment of coincidence."¹⁹ Hardy has a purpose in this contrived situation. He needs to further the estrangement between Clym and Eustacia on the one hand and Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia on the other. He could have done this differently perhaps, less artificially, less dramatically, but we have seen the influence of the folk tale upon him, and, as Davidson paraphrases Hardy's words of July 1881, "The traditional story admits, and even cherishes, the improbable and unpredictable. The miraculous or nearly miraculous, is what makes a story a story in the old way. Unless a story has some strange and unusual features it will hardly be told and will not be remembered."²⁰

So it is that Hardy, deciding that he must provide a dramatic event to drive a wedge between Clym and his mother, makes the event strange and memorable.

In the same way accident brings about the catastrophic ending. Hardy tells us that neither Wildeve nor Eustacia lost dignity by sudden death. "Misfortune had struck them gracefully, cutting off their erratic histories with a catastrophic dash, instead of, as with many,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 85.
attenuating each life to an uninteresting meagreness through long years of wrinkles, neglect and decay."\textsuperscript{21} Hardy has used accident to provide this "catastrophic dash" and has by its means certainly prevented his novel being attentuated to "uninteresting meagreness." The \textit{Return of the Native} is one of the clearest examples of his use of accident and chance to speed up the action and cause what is inevitable to happen earlier than it would otherwise have done.

In Eustacia's tragedy we see, as we did in the misfortunes of Grace and Bathsheba, human elements reinforcing chance. It is chance, perhaps, which leads to a meeting between Wildeve and Eustacia on at least two occasions, but what happens as a result of those two meetings is due to the character and actions of the two who meet. There is the same combination of chance and human reaction in \textit{Tess of the d'Urbervilles} and there are also accident and coincidence used to hint at the supernatural, intensify atmosphere and emphasize contrasts. These devices are not used as obviously as in \textit{The Return of the Native} to hasten the climax, but the death of Jack Darbeyfield occurring when it does, the subsequent eviction of Joan and the children from their home, drives Tess back to

\textsuperscript{21}Thomas Hardy, \textit{The Return of the Native}, p. 385.
Alec and to his murder and her execution. This death hastens the inevitable ending, but does not change the course of Tess's life. Hardy has given her little chance for happiness, born as she is with "the acquiescent and drifting disposition of her family with an impetuous streak from the d'Urbervilles of long ago." 22 She is beautiful, ignorant, unprotected by family background and, it is suggested at various points in the novel, with the weight of the unexpiated sins of her ancestors on her shoulders. Her path is beset by accidents which force her further and further along the road to disaster.

Again, coincidence sets in motion a chain of events. Jack Darbeyfield learns from a chance meeting that he is a descendant of the once powerful d'Urberville family. He celebrates to such a degree that his daughter, Tess, has to be awakened to drive to market in his place. She falls asleep and the silent mail-cart impales her horse. Feeling responsible for the death of the horse, Tess allows her mother to send her to rich Mrs. d'Urberville to claim kin. The coincidence gave Darbeyfield an excuse to celebrate but he needed little excuse for celebrations and in any case had already decided to get his

strength up by spending the evening at Rolliver's Inn. His drinking, allied with his ill-health, could well have prevented him from driving even if he had not met the antiquary. Tess is less to blame. She was naturally sleepy, but had she been more alert, she might have realized the approach of the mail-cart and averted disaster. Mrs. Darbeyfield has the dreamy optimism which will urge her daughter into a dangerous situation, confident that all will turn out for the best. None of the three looks forward realistically and so Tess takes the first step along the road to tragedy.

There is much the same combination of chance and human agency about the seduction episode. The coincidence of a fair and a market, the breaking of a jar of syrup which arouses the ill-temper of two sisters who had been Alec's earlier favourites, and the distance between Trantridge and Chaseborough, make it seem inevitable that Tess accept Alec's help. Yet human agency is here. Alec cannot be accused of lack of forethought. He is not there by chance. He has heard Tess and her companions from a distance and "ridden creepingly forward" to find out what is going on. He takes advantage of the situation while Tess passively submits. Later the field

23 Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 83.
workers speak of sobbing having been heard in The Chase, suggesting that Tess could have obtained aid had she been more alert and anxious for assistance.

In the same heedless way Tess drifts into promising to marry Angel and defers telling him of her past. Just before the wedding Angel and Tess drive into the nearest town. A Trantridge man is there by chance. He sees Tess, recognizes her and makes an insulting comment. Angel strikes him and the affair is glossed over by an apology from the man and a few shillings from Angel. But the coincidence is too much for Tess, who worries about the chance encounter. Angel's dream in which he relives the fight and pummels his portmanteau is "the last drachm required to turn the scale of her indecision." 24 She cannot bring herself to tell Angel of her past but she writes "a succinct narrative of those events of three or four years ago," puts it in an envelope, directs it to Angel Clare and slips it under his door. She is careless, or perhaps her subconscious desire to conceal the information in the letter from Angel influences her. The letter is thrust beneath the carpet and Angel never sees it. The Trantridge man's words make Tess act, but the action comes to nothing. It shows, though, that passive Tess can be

24 Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 238.
driven to act if she feels that Angel is in any way threatened. This foreshadows the murder, when she is as suddenly spurred to action.

Throughout the novel coincidence makes us aware of the link between Tess and the ancient d'Urberville family. The ill-omened d'Urberville coach is sensed by Tess on her wedding day and heard in a dream just before she and her family are evicted from their home. Tess and Angel go to a farmhouse "once portion of a fine manorial residence and the property and seat of a d'Urberville"\(^{25}\) after their wedding and it is there that Tess finally makes her deferred confession. It is there that Angel is influenced by the portrait of the d'Urberville dame with her "sinister design" lurking in her features and her "concentrated purpose of revenge on the other sex"\(^{26}\) which he thinks resembles Tess. Angel is influenced by this coincidence to leave his bride, but the decision is his own.

After her husband's death Joan Darbeyfield decides to move the family to Kingsbere where the family vaults of the d'Urbervilles are situated. Her letter asking

\(^{25}\)Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 247.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 266.
for lodgings arrives late, and this accident drives the Darbeyfields to find shelter beneath the d'Urberville Window, using the curtained bed as a tent. All through the novel are echoes of the past d'Urbervilles, suggestions of the suffering that they inflicted on the poor and the feeling that in some mysterious way Tess suffers for their sins. Hardy uses coincidence to establish these links with the past.

Angel's reliving of his fight with the Trantridge man and his later sleep-walking during the brief period he and Tess spend together after their marriage is typically Hardy. Both show the struggle in Angel's mind. It is possible that on the first occasion some doubts about Tess have been implanted which the apology has not entirely uprooted. The intensity of Angel's reaction at least makes clear the importance that he places on his wife's spotless reputation. On the second occasion Angel is obviously suppressing his kindlier impulses. Roy Morrell calls such scenes "grotesque" and suggests that they "set chords vibrating through the whole novel."27 The question of Angel's attitude to Tess is, of course, the most important to her happiness, but we see, spreading from that centre the attitudes of others towards her: the clergyman who shows so little sympathy when

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27 Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy: the Will and the Way, p. 65.
Sorrow dies, Angel's brothers, his parents, Mercy Chant, the villagers who wish to keep their village pure, the Darbeyfields who expect her to support them, Alec. Hardy shows clearly that Tess's suffering comes through society, not through Fate. Coincidence emphasizes Tess's position as victim of society by paralleling it with the dying pheasants, the victims of the hunters; it points up, by Alec's mistake of the stone of ill-omen for a holy cross, the falseness of his view of religion. It contrasts the wicked d'Urbervilles who seduced maidens, dispossessed the poor and committed murder, with their descendant, Tess, who is seduced, dispossessed but is finally driven by society to murder. Her ancestors preyed on society; she is society's prey.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy's hero is a man of commerce, his background the realistic one of trade. We meet Henchard first when he is at the age of twenty-one; at the time when, angry and frustrated because he is unable to satisfy his ambition, he sells his wife. We meet him again after nearly twenty years and watch as figures from his past reappear and he attempts to deal with the situations which they create.

The first scene in the novel certainly sets chords vibrating throughout the rest of the work, but little

chance can be detected in it. Henchard resents being encumbered with a wife and child; he has spoken of selling his wife before. It is by chance that Newson arrives at this moment, but this is the only accident in the episode.

In the twenty years which pass largely unrecorded in the novel, Henchard prospers, rising to become a wealthy dealer in hay and grain and eventually, Mayor of Casterbridge. It is at this point that his wife, Susan, reappears in his life, bringing with her her daughter, Elizabeth-Jane. There is a certain coincidence in Henchard's wife, Susan, finding the furmity woman who was present at the sale and from her learning of Henchard's whereabouts, but it is a reasonable enough means of bringing husband and wife together and merely serves to hasten a reunion necessary for the plot.

Coincidence also sends a young Scotsman to Casterbridge on his way to the coast, but it is Henchard's sudden liking, his almost oppressive generosity, which persuades Farfrae to stay. It is an equally sudden liking for Elizabeth-Jane as well as his desire "to make amends to his neglected Susan" that leads him to remarriage with his former wife.

\[29\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 86}\]
From this point Henchard's fortunes begin to decline. The close relationship between the two declines as Henchard shows himself suspicious of Farfrae's popularity in Casterbridge. A fête in which Henchard's elaborate preparations are ruined by rain, while Farfrae's comparatively simple affair is a huge success because under cover, incites clearly misplaced jealousy and anger in Henchard and causes him to dismiss Farfrae as his manager. Here we see Henchard suffering from his own lack of foresight and trying to blame his failure at the fête on some other agency. It is at this point that Hardy comments "character is fate," and we can clearly see Henchard's character forming the path along which he will travel.

Through an improperly sealed letter, Henchard learns at Susan's death that Elizabeth is Newson's daughter. It is by means of coincidence that he learns of her parentage but his coldness to the confused and lonely girl springs from his own character, adds to his own loneliness and finally drives Elizabeth to leave him and go to live with his previous mistress, Lucetta Templeton.

Henchard now tries to recoup his losses by buying huge quantities of grain on the advice of a weather forecaster. As in the case of the fête, it is not the accident of bad weather, but his own impatient, impulsive
nature which brings him to grief. He sells too soon and loses a great deal of money.

Now coincidence deals Henchard its harshest blow. The furmity woman is brought before him as he sits as magistrate. Allowed to speak in her defence, she attacks Henchard, telling of the wife sale. Henchard does not attempt to silence her. She symbolizes his past, personifies his guilt, and he seems almost relieved to have her tell his secret.

Henchard's ill-treatment of his first wife becomes known to Lucetta. She decides to marry Farfrae rather than fulfill her obligation to Henchard. When Henchard saves her from a bull she is eager to help him but cannot do as he asks and pretend to his chief creditor, Grower, that she and Henchard are to be married, because, by another coincidence, Grower had happened to be at Port Bredy at the same time as she and Farfrae and so had witnessed their marriage.

Step by step Hardy shows Henchard bringing misfortune on himself by his impulsive, urgent actions. The end has the effect of a landslide, although the image used in the skimmity-ride delays the inevitable by appearing at the moment when Henchard is contemplating death. The character of Henchard, by its impetuosity and impulse, appears to control the action and move it forward. He
deliberately isolates himself at the beginning of the novel by selling his wife and child. He is later shorn of those for whom he cares: Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta and finally Elizabeth-Jane. Farfrae makes no attempt to separate Henchard from Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard's loss comes from his own character. Had he not impulsively lied to Newson, sent him away so that he and Elizabeth would not meet, Henchard would not fear Elizabeth-Jane's reaction when she knew the truth. It is due to his own action that he must leave Elizabeth, and his action springs from his own 'act first, think later' character. This novel is the clearest example of Hardy's use of character as the motivating force in a novel. Here "character is fate," indeed. Henchard cannot blame fate, accident or coincidence for what happens to him.

Whereas it is only too easy to find tragic flaws in Henchard's character, Jude of Jude the Obscure is a man of many virtues. His extreme kindness, to the birds that he is supposed to scare from the crop, to his cousin Sue, to his old aunt, to his undeserving wife, Arabella, is one of his most noticeable traits. Then his intelligence, his scholastic ability and his skill as a stonemason are attractive qualities. At the beginning of the book, and indeed for considerably longer than

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30 Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan), 1895.
one would expect, Jude reveals a trust in human nature and a belief in the ultimate justice of providence, which are again appealing. However, Hardy portrays Jude as obsessed by the desire to study at the University of Christminster. He is thwarted at first by lack of books, time, money; but finally, at the age of nineteen, an apprentice stonemason, he plans to move to Christminster. Instead he meets Arabella who deliberately traps him into marriage. They have little in common and Arabella soon leaves him to go to Australia with her family.

Finally in Christminster, Jude soon finds that he has no chance of entering a college. He also meets his cousin, Sue Bridehead, and enters into a frustrating relationship with her. Sue marries Phillotson, a schoolmaster, and divorces him; Jude divorces Arabella, and Sue and Jude, together with Father Time, the son of Arabella and Jude, live in Christminster. However, the fact that they are not legally married seems to pursue Sue and Jude and prevent their happiness. Father Time hangs their two children and commits suicide himself "because we are too manny." Sue decides that she should return to Phillotson, Jude allows Arabella to re-marry him, and finally dies, cursing the day on which he was born.
The most noticeable coincidences in *Jude the Obscure* are ironic and are used either for emphasis or contrast. For example, Sue reads Swinburne "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean" at the same time as Jude, oblivious of her, is studying his Griesbach text. The psalm, "Whereewithal shall a young man cleanse his way" is sung as Jude is worrying about his unworthiness to associate with Sue. Sometimes coincidence contrasts the condition of one character in the novel with his surrounding, as when the organ notes sound while Jude lies dying, or when the joyous bells are heard at his funeral. In the same way the anthem "Truly God is loving unto Israel" is heard by Jude and Sue when their minds are filled with grief for the dead children; and the clergymen arguing about the eastward position show their preoccupation with minor matters while Jude and Sue are faced with problems of life and death.

The plot contains little real coincidence. The meeting between Arabella and Jude is engineered by the girl and it is she, not fate and coincidence, who manipulates Jude's life to a point where, free of her at last, he plans again to go to Christminster. Once there, his life is governed by two forces, his rejection by the University and his love for Sue, who, even when they are both free to marry, fears the coercion of legal
marriage, and so adds to Jude's problems. Reunions between various characters do not strain credibility. There is little coincidence about Arabella and Sue meeting at the Great Wessex Agricultural show or at the Spring Fair at Kennetbridge.

Often an overheard conversation or the sight of a couple about to be married seems a chance happening to further discourage Jude and Sue from marrying, but it seems likely that Sue, and to a lesser degree Jude, are merely finding confirmation of a course already decided upon. The latter part of the novel shows Arabella once more manipulating Jude's life, with Jude himself, once Sue is lost to him, deliberately loosening his hold upon it.

The death of the children is the pivotal scene of the novel and like the grotesque scenes in Hardy's earlier novels, sends chords vibrating through the book. Hardy tells us that on Father Time "had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last." The beginning of the coming universal wish not to live which Sue had suggested earlier and Jude shows later is expressed plainly here.

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31 Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 348.
This scene contributes to plot development in the same way as coincidence does in other Hardy novels but there is little pure chance about it. Sue tells the landlady that she and Jude are not married. The landlady's reaction could easily be foreseen. The character of Father Time, who cannot even enjoy flowers because they wither so soon, is carefully shown by Hardy well before the family arrives in Christminster, and it is easy to see that Sue's words as she tells him of their difficulties, and that there is to be another baby, are likely to provoke some extreme reaction. The strange thing is that Sue, who knows the boy well, could not realize the result that her words might have. Sue's passion for honesty so often causes suffering to others; this scene shows it also recoiling on her own head. For the purpose of plot development, Sue must be given an extreme shock. She must doubt the rightness of her views on marriage and probably only the death of her children would cause her to do this. It is her feeling that she is being punished that drives her from her agnostic position back to the High Church teaching she had known as a girl. This teaching causes her to reject Jude and return to Phillotson, who in the eyes of the Church is her legal husband.

This tragic happening can hardly be attributed to chance, and the same is true for the whole tragedy of
Jude the Obscure. For Jude, his love for Sue and his love for Christminster and the lack of the response which he desired and probably deserved, from either, is his tragedy. In the society in which Jude lives, aspiring from his humble position to enter a college at Christminster can bring him only humiliation and derision; attempting to live with Sue outside the bonds of marriage can bring him only hostility and condemnation. It is his added misfortune that since Sue with her "unusually weak and fastidious" sexual instinct is what she is, attempting to win a generous response from her can bring him only frustration. Jude is like Tess in that he appears to ask little of life and to be basically a fine person yet he is forced by someone else into opposing society's rules and is then punished by society. Like Tess, Jude suffers not from fate manifest through accident and coincidence which no one can avert, but through people.

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32 Thomas Hardy, Life, p. 272.
5. CONCLUSION

In Hardy's earlier novels he experiments with coincidence and accident, using them in various ways. He uses them both to inject melodrama for the sake of extra liveliness, and also to hasten to its conclusion a chain of events which would otherwise reach the same conclusion in a longer period of time.

By the time he wrote *The Woodlanders* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* he was using them mostly to hasten a climax by setting a chain of events in motion but he was also using coincidence in "grotesque" scenes which create moods and emphasize atmosphere, and accident in ways which reveal character. In the semi-tragedies and his four great tragedies, Hardy uses what at first appears to be coincidence to create an atmosphere of lowering fate hovering over his characters. However a careful examination will show that many of the 'coincidences' are more accident than fate and are often the result of carelessness or undue optimism on the part of the sufferer. Since accidents and coincidences invariably work against the hero the reader is bound to feel that they form a pattern of intervention, that life is weighted against man. However Hardy's "Novembry"
cast of mind, his sensitive awareness of the suffering around him, account for this pattern rather than his deliberately propounding a philosophical system.

Hardy enjoyed using coincidence and accident as the balladeers used it, to add colour and excitement and hint at the supernatural. Examples of his use of coincidence to inject melodrama are the dicing scene from *The Return of the Native* and, less effective, the journey of Smith and Knight on the same train as Elfride's body in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. The storm in *Two on a Tower* and Knight's fall from the cliff are accidents of the same type, although the latter episode has ludicrous moments as well as exciting ones. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* coincidence is used to establish links between Tess and her d'Urberville ancestors. References such as those to the d'Urberville coach, hint at a supernatural influence in Tess's life.

Sometimes Hardy uses accident and coincidence to prove ironic contrast. Tess is reunited with her previous companions at the starve-acre place and their miserable life there contrasts with their happiness at the lush Talbothay's dairy farm. Grace and Giles are just contemplating a happy future after Grace is freed from her husband, when a letter from Beaucock tells Giles that no divorce is possible.
Various uses of symbolism can be seen in the coincidences which occur throughout Hardy's novels. The wounded pheasants foreshadow Tess's fate; the singed pigeons in *The Woodlanders* presage the pain that love will bring to Grace and Fitzpiers. The pigeons are oblivious of the fire until they are singed, Grace and Fitzpiers are equally blind to the dangers of their infatuation.

Sometimes accident helps to reveal character through symbolism, as the physical blindness of Clym Yeobright indicates his blindness to the needs of Eustacia, or the caged bird symbolizes Henchard's imprisonment to his spiritual starvation.

Accident also helps to reveal character more directly. The rain which spoils Henchard's fete and makes Farfrae's less spectacular one a success enables Hardy to show us the characters of the two men in contrast. Henchard might have foreseen the possibility of wet weather and taken precautions as Farfrae did.

Coincidence and accident are used by Hardy in *Two on a Tower* to show how powerless humanity is against the impersonal blows of chance and how gallantly some individuals endure these blows. In other novels they show that what at first appears an unavoidable blow is an accident which foresight could have softened. Henchard
could not have prevented the rain, Giles could not have prevented John South's death, but in each case the possibility of such a disaster could have been foreseen and steps taken to ease the consequences.

Often several uses of coincidence can be found in a single scene. When Bathsheba and Troy meet in *Far from the Madding Crowd* their meeting is dramatic, symbolic and sets in motion a chain of events. Hardy could have had his two characters meet casually, by daylight, in the main street of the village, perhaps introduced by a mutual acquaintance. Instead they meet where it is "black as the ninth plague of Egypt"¹ and in "a vast, low naturally formed hall, the plummy ceiling of which was supported by slender pillars of living wood, the floor being covered with a soft dun carpet of dead spikelets and mildewed cones, with a tuft of grass-blades here and there.⁴² Bathsheba's skirt is tugged and pinned forcibly to the ground, nearly throwing her off balance. She discovers that she is hooked to a man "brilliant in brass and scarlet"³ whose sudden appearance in the lantern light is like the sound of a trumpet.

¹Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, p. 181.

²Ibid., p. 181.

³Ibid., p. 182.
This coincidence sets in motion a chain of events. The wilful Bathsheba, who has toyed with the devotion of Oak and Boldwood, is now to fall in love with Troy, and set match to a fire which will burn her and Oak, and destroy Boldwood, Troy and Fanny.

The power which Troy will have over Bathsheba is foreshadowed as we see them linked by his spur, despite her struggles to free herself. The spur is a Cupid's dart which will leave her at the mercy of the soldier.

Hardy frequently uses coincidence to manipulate time; often to speed events as in *The Return of the Native* or *Two on a Tower*; rarely to slow them as in *The Well-beloved* or to postpone the inevitable as when Henchard's suicide is prevented by his seeing his image in the water. However, although chance may appear to alter the speed with which events occur, it never alters the course of their logically developing sequence. Hardy never allows coincidence to falsify a character he has drawn nor change the course along which the novel is progressing.

In Hardy's tragedy, then, we do not find fate pulling strings nor chance controlling the plot. It is true that in *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* there is a great deal of coincidence, and chance does seem at times to work against the heroines, but the characters of the girls and the situations into
which they are born, make happiness extremely unlikely for them. There is no need for Hardy to have a doomster pulling strings for their lives to end unhappily. What he does do, is use coincidence to accelerate this unhappy ending. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the tragedy is the more conventional one of a hero with a tragic flaw in character. Henchard's impetuosity is the cause of his downfall and although coincidence hastens the climax, it does not change it. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy's final word in prose fiction to the world, coincidence plays no part. It is possible that Hardy, indignant because Tess had been misunderstood and considered by some critics to be an attempt to postulate a philosophy, was determined to show that the evils which befall Jude are positively attributable to society, not God.

Hardy used coincidence and accident primarily to hasten inevitable endings, to intensify atmosphere, with hints of the supernatural and elements beyond man's control, but never to change the course of a logically developing sequence of events. Hence coincidence and accident in Hardy are employed as technical devices and not as evidence of forces working consciously or unconsciously against the intentions of men. They are no part of a philosophic system.
Primary Sources


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