

Explore the importance of fate in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Tess of D'Urbervilles*.

Fate is an elemental concept, both universally understood and eternally abstract. It is with this ambiguity that fate features in both Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy's nineteenth century novels. In "*Pride and Prejudice*", fate takes on a loose, linearly developed nature of minor significance; the characters actively seek and succeed in avoiding or changing their fate to a much greater degree. In "*Tess of D'Urbervilles*", fate acts as an imperative, overarching and unchanging framework; within its parameters, the characters are doomed to struggle in vain.

In Austen's reality, fate is not concrete; she presents each of the Bennetts' fates as stemming from the Law of Entailment - a manmade construct; the ultimate ending is unknown and therefore needs to be secured, giving meat to the body of the novel. It is from this lack of predestination that Mrs. Bennett and the rest of the gentry are determined to take action in order to prevent their daughters from being destitute. Marriage is the key "action" in the novel as it almost entirely determines the character's following existence, and prime examples of characters making decisions that affect their future would be Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennett. Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins are not in love, and a marriage between the two would not have been an inevitable natural progression. Instead, she consciously decides to wed him for the sake of her financial security - a comfortable conclusion. In the case of Lydia Bennett, she strays from her mother's impending matchmaking and elopes with Wickham, resulting in a premature marriage of instability and waning affections. By elucidating the gap between the two alternate endings, Austen highlights how much more important the characters' decisions are than fate as the driving force of their lives.

The short epilogue following the bulk of the plot also serves as an example of Austen's attitude towards the role of fate, deconstructing the idea of predestination completely by presenting a variety of endings that arose from the same circumstances. After being privy to the details of the story, the reader is in a position to fully understand how each denouement came to be through the choices and actions of each character. The obvious merit and detriment of each ending acts as a moral of sorts, emphasising the importance of initiative in crafting your own destiny. Fate is of minor importance in "*Pride and Prejudice*", hardly accepted by any of the characters and by all means relatively malleable.

From the very beginning, Tess' life is suggested to be a temporal one, with a multitude of references to her tragedy, already a stark difference to the indefinite nature of fate in "*Pride and Prejudice*". Shortly before Abraham declares that upon going to live with Mrs. D'Urberville they would "ride in her coach and wear black clothes", Tess muses upon the "blighted star" that she lives upon, accidentally steering the family horse to his death by impalement. The death of Prince both foreshadows Alec's fate by throwing a blood-stained Tess into the "light of a murderess" as well as being the first of many instances whereby external forces seem to be working towards the novel's decidedly unfair ending due to the uncanny conditions under which it occurred - her father's inebriation was very opportune to happen just after Tess was presented with a lot of distracting thoughts. Similarly, a stranger in the alehouse warns Joan Durbeyfield not to "get green malt in flower", alluding to Tess' later pregnancy, and her unpleasant carriage ride with Alec also serves to illustrate the abusive dynamic of their relationship. Hardy heavy-handedly confirms her doomed existence, and by the end of the novel makes it clear that fate had always been inescapable, an integral part of "Nature's holy plan".

Hardy's final statement on the injustice of fate is encapsulated in the retribution Tess faces for murdering Alec; something that we understand as unfair, but that serves to underline the ruthlessness of her predetermined demise. Knowing what we do as readers, Tess' decision to kill Alec is completely justified and proportional to his crime against her, and should be heralded as one of her only acts of self-interest throughout the novel. The fact that this is met with disapproval from society and results in "The President of the Immortals [ending] his sport with Tess" truly emphasises that fate was a rigid construct, and that nothing Tess did - both passively and actively - would have been to any avail. Fate in "*Tess of D'Urbervilles*" is of great importance both to highlight the futility of her actions and the frustrating tragedy of the tale.

While featuring in both, fate takes on very different characteristics in “Pride and Prejudice” and “Tess of D’Urbervilles”. Austen chooses to present it as a flexible construct, one to be moulded according to the characters’ desires, with a variety of alternate endings depending on the individual. Hardy on the other hand, paints fate out to be a cruel mistress, decided from the start and unwavering in her punishment. The difference in nature between the two comment on the gap between the gentry and the common people; the characters in “Pride and Prejudice” are free to gambol how they may without severe ramifications, whereas Tess’ fate is much more drastic due to her living circumstances, and decisions can affect life or death. Exploring the importance of fate in both novels leads to the conclusion that being able to make choices, let alone ones that can in fact affect your future success, is a privilege.