

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Some critics have said that fate conspires against Tess, and that she is not responsible for the things which happen to her. She herself says, ³I am more sinned against than sinning.² Do you agree or disagree? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

As a person who believes that many things are un-avoidable, no matter how careful you are to avoid them, I believe that Tess's life was tragically destroyed by the hand of fate. It is obvious through the words and actions of Tess that she only wanted to have a calm, normal life. However, it seems that she was chosen, for whatever reason, to be on the receiving end of continuous hardships.

From the very beginning of the novel, Tess receives ³the short end of the stick² in almost every scene. She is one of the girls who doesn't get to dance with the strange young man before he returns to his brothers. Although they exchange looks at each other, he runs off into the night without a word spoken between them. This is our first glimpse of Tess, and even before we learn more about her, we know that her family is not well off and that her father seems to be a bit of a drunk. Next, she is, to a degree, railroaded into going to claim kinship to the d'Urbervilles.

³Well, as I killed the horse, mother,¹ she said mournfully, I suppose I ought to do something. I don't mind going and seeing her, but you must leave it to me about asking for help.²

Tess was very reluctant to go to the d'Urberville house and ask for help, but for some reason, her parents chose her. At the d'Urberville's house, Alec first harasses Tess when they go horseback riding, forcing her to let him kiss her. After that, another event occurs that shows the vulnerability of innocent Tess. The event is written about with a air that could make fate seem a definite cause for the actions against her well being.

³One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter²

This passage shows that it was not because of Tess's actions that this outrageous cruelty occurred to her. It shows that it was to have happened as a pay back for the wrong doings of her ancestors. This can only be viewed as a form of fate, for it was determined before the birth of Tess or any of her immediate family that somewhere in the lineage of the d'Urbervilles, there must be a type of retribution

that will occur for past crimes.

Another example of fate causing problems in Tess's life occurs when she tries to tell Angel about the incident that occurred before she met up with him at the dairy. She is very sincere in her attempt to let him know of this devastating event during which her virginity was lost. Unfortunately, the letter detailing Tess's past, when slipped under the door of Angel's room also slipped under the rug on his floor. Angel never got to read the letter, and therefore doesn't know about Tess's past. Angel and Tess go ahead with their marriage and the pasts of both of them come back to disrupt both of their lives.

The carpet reached close to the sill, and
under the edge of the carpet she discerned
the faint white margin of the envelope
containing her letter to him...she withdrew
the letter. There it was-sealed up, just
as it had left her hands...she could not
let him read it now.²

There is, if not fate, at least an irony in that many times she tried to tell Angel of that night, and every time she could not bring herself to do it. However, the one time that she was able to complete her thoughts and commit herself to telling the truth, something as simple and harmless as a rug prevented her from communicating her thoughts. Fate comes into the picture again after Angel leaves for South America. With nowhere left to go, she must return to the person with whom her problems began; Alec d'Urberville. It seems that in the last part of this novel, fate comes down upon all three main characters. Undoubtedly, Alec suffers the hand of fate by meeting his death from the woman whose life he destroyed. Tess, of course, is fated to die for the murder of Alec d'Urberville and Angel is crushed by the knowledge that if he could have forgiven Tess when she told him of her loss of innocence, that they would be together.

Fate, along with tragic irony play a large part in this novel. As stated before, some events are out of our control and cannot be prevented by any amount of planning. It seems hard to believe that all of this could happen to one purpose without there being a purpose. Perhaps the purpose was that of Angel and Liza-Lu to become involved. Possibly, that was not the purpose, but there must be one.

