



# The Imperium of Fate and Coincidence in Thomas Hardy

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**Abstract:** This study examines the theme of fate and coincidence in the works of Thomas Hardy, focusing on how these elements influence the lives of his characters and shape the narrative. Through a comprehensive analysis of secondary sources, the study aims to shed light on Hardy's portrayal of the imperium of fate and coincidence in his novels and poems, highlighting the philosophical and existential questions raised by these themes in his literary works.

**Keywords:** Thomas Hardy, fate, coincidence, determinism, tragedy, narrative, characters

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## INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy, one of the most renowned Victorian novelists and poets, is known for his profound exploration of human existence, particularly the role of fate and coincidence in shaping individual lives. Hardy's works often depict characters who struggle against seemingly insurmountable odds, only to be confronted by the harsh realities of fate and chance. Thomas Hardy's literary legacy is characterized by a profound examination of the human condition, with themes of fate and coincidence recurring throughout his works (Millgate, 2011). These themes not only serve as narrative devices but also invite readers to contemplate the complexities of existence and the extent to which individuals are masters of their own destinies. This review paper seeks to explore the imperium of fate and coincidence in Hardy's writings, drawing from a wide array of secondary sources to analyze their significance and implications.

### A. Fate in Hardy's Works

Central to Hardy's narrative tapestry is the concept of fate, often depicted as an inexorable force shaping the lives of his characters (Morgan, 2004). In novels such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, fate manifests as a series of predetermined events that propel the protagonists towards tragic ends. Tess's doomed trajectory, for instance, is marked by a succession of seemingly inevitable misfortunes, highlighting the futility of resistance against an implacable fate (Kramer, 2018). Similarly, Jude's aspirations are thwarted by a cruel twist of fate, underscoring the deterministic nature of Hardy's universe.

### B. Coincidence as Narrative Device

In addition to fate, coincidence plays a significant role in Hardy's narratives, often serving as a catalyst for pivotal events (Langbaum, 2018). The chance encounter between characters or the fortuitous occurrence of

circumstances frequently drives the plot forward, imbuing the narrative with a sense of unpredictability and irony. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for instance, Michael Henchard's impulsive act of auctioning his wife in a fit of drunkenness sets off a chain of events that reverberate throughout the novel (Sloan, 2003). This reliance on coincidence not only adds depth to Hardy's storytelling but also underscores the capriciousness of life itself.

### C. Philosophical Underpinnings

At its core, Hardy's exploration of fate and coincidence raises profound philosophical questions about the nature of existence and the human condition (O'Gorman, 2016). His characters grapple with the tension between free will and determinism, confronting the limitations of agency in a world governed by external forces. Through their trials and tribulations, Hardy invites readers to ponder the existential quandaries posed by the imperium of fate and coincidence, forcing us to confront our own mortality and insignificance in the grand scheme of things (Cox, 2013).

### D. Critical Reception and Interpretations

The imperium of fate and coincidence in Hardy's works has elicited a myriad of critical interpretations, ranging from deterministic readings to more nuanced explorations of agency and choice (Ingham, 2015). Scholars have debated the extent to which Hardy's universe is governed by fate, with some viewing his deterministic worldview as inherently pessimistic, while others argue for a more nuanced understanding that allows for individual autonomy within a larger framework of cosmic forces (Ray, 2017). Regardless of the interpretative lens employed, it is evident that fate and coincidence occupy a central place in the critical discourse surrounding Hardy's oeuvre.

### E. Research Objectives

- To examine the concept of fate in Thomas Hardy's works and its impact on character development.
- To explore the role of coincidence in Hardy's narratives and its significance in shaping plotlines.
- To analyze the philosophical and existential implications of fate and coincidence in Hardy's portrayal of human life.
- To assess the critical reception and scholarly interpretations of fate and coincidence in Hardy's works.

## THE CONCEPT OF FATE IN THOMAS HARDY'S WORKS

Thomas Hardy, renowned for his novels and poetry that delve deep into the human experience, often grapples with the concept of fate. In Hardy's context, fate is depicted as a powerful force that shapes the lives of his characters, often leading them to tragic ends. This essay explores Hardy's portrayal of fate, examining how it influences character decisions and outcomes, and compares his treatment of fate with other literary works that explore similar themes.

### A. Definition of Fate in Hardy's Context

In Hardy's works, fate is not merely a predetermined outcome, but a complex interplay of chance, external circumstances, and individual choices. Fate is often depicted as an external force that controls the lives of his characters, pushing them towards a predetermined destiny. However, Hardy also suggests that individuals have some degree of agency, as they are able to make choices that can alter their fate, albeit within limits set by external forces.

### **B. Examples of How Fate Influences Character Decisions and Outcomes**

One of the most striking examples of fate in Hardy's works is the character of Tess in "Tess of the d'Urbervilles." Despite Tess's efforts to escape her tragic fate, she is ultimately unable to overcome the forces working against her, leading to her untimely demise. Similarly, in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," the protagonist, Michael Henchard, is plagued by a series of unfortunate events that are seemingly beyond his control, ultimately leading to his downfall.

### **C. Comparison with Other Literary Works**

Hardy's treatment of fate is reminiscent of other literary works that explore similar themes. For example, in Shakespeare's "Macbeth," the titular character's tragic downfall is largely attributed to the workings of fate, as prophesied by the witches. Similarly, in Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex," the protagonist's attempts to avoid his fate only serve to fulfill it, highlighting the inevitability of fate.

## **THE ROLE OF COINCIDENCE IN HARDY'S NARRATIVES**

Thomas Hardy, a masterful storyteller known for his intricate narratives, often employs coincidence as a narrative device in his works. This essay delves into the definition and significance of coincidence in Hardy's narratives, analyzes key coincidences in selected works, and interprets how coincidence contributes to plot development, drawing upon examples from his novels and poetry.

### **A. Definition and Significance of Coincidence in Hardy's Narratives**

Coincidence, in Hardy's narratives, refers to the occurrence of events or circumstances that seem unlikely or improbable but serve to drive the plot forward or to underscore thematic elements. Coincidences in Hardy's works often involve chance encounters between characters, unexpected twists of fate, or seemingly random occurrences that have profound consequences for the story. Significantly, these coincidences are not merely plot contrivances but are intricately woven into the fabric of Hardy's narratives, contributing to the overall thematic richness and complexity of his works.

### **B. Analysis of Key Coincidences in Selected Works**

One of the most notable instances of coincidence in Hardy's novels is found in "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," where Tess encounters Alec d'Urberville, the man who will ultimately bring about her downfall, by chance. This encounter sets off a chain of events that dramatically alter Tess's life trajectory and leads to her tragic fate (Hardy, 2003). Similarly, in "Far from the Madding Crowd," the chance meeting between Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak at the beginning of the novel sets the stage for their complex relationship and

the intertwining of their fates (Hardy, 2001).

In "The Mayor of Casterbridge," coincidence plays a pivotal role in the downfall of the protagonist, Michael Henchard. The accidental sale of his wife, Susan, and daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, early in the novel sets off a series of events that culminate in tragedy for Henchard (Hardy, 2003). This coincidence not only drives the plot forward but also serves as a commentary on the unpredictability of life and the fragility of human relationships.

### **C. Interpretation of How Coincidence Contributes to Plot Development**

Coincidence in Hardy's narratives serves to highlight the role of fate and chance in shaping human lives. By incorporating coincidences into his stories, Hardy underscores the idea that individuals are often at the mercy of forces beyond their control. However, Hardy also suggests that these coincidences can be transformative, leading characters to new insights about themselves and their place in the world.

Furthermore, coincidence in Hardy's works serves to create a sense of interconnectedness among his characters and their lives. The chance encounters and events that occur throughout his narratives are not random but are part of a larger pattern that reflects the interconnectedness of all things. This interconnectedness reinforces Hardy's themes of fate, determinism, and the complexity of human relationships.

Thomas Hardy's use of coincidence in his narratives adds depth and complexity to his storytelling, underscoring the role of fate and chance in shaping human lives. Through his skillful incorporation of coincidences into his works, Hardy invites readers to contemplate the unpredictable nature of life and the ways in which seemingly random events can have profound consequences.

## **PHILOSOPHICAL AND EXISTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS IN THOMAS HARDY'S WORKS**

Thomas Hardy, a prominent figure in English literature, often delves into philosophical and existential themes in his works, particularly concerning the concepts of determinism and chance. This essay explores the philosophical themes related to determinism and chance in Hardy's works, examines the existential questions raised by his portrayal of fate and coincidence, and compares his treatment of these themes with other philosophical works that discuss similar ideas.

### **A. Philosophical Themes Related to Determinism and Chance in Hardy's Works**

Hardy's works often reflect a deterministic worldview, suggesting that human lives are governed by forces beyond their control (Millgate, 2001). Characters in his novels often find themselves trapped in a web of fate, unable to escape their predetermined destinies. For example, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess's tragic fate seems to be sealed from the moment she is born into a lower-class family with limited opportunities for advancement (Hardy, 2003). Similarly, in *Jude the Obscure*, Jude's dreams of becoming a scholar are constantly thwarted by circumstances beyond his control, leading to his ultimate downfall (Hardy, 2003).

At the same time, Hardy's works also acknowledge the role of chance in human life (Morgan, 2004).

Coincidences and random events often play a significant role in shaping the course of his characters' lives, highlighting the unpredictability of existence. This tension between determinism and chance underscores the complexity of human experience in Hardy's narratives.

### **B. Existential Questions Raised by Hardy's Portrayal of Fate and Coincidence**

Hardy's portrayal of fate and coincidence raises profound existential questions about the nature of human existence. His characters often grapple with the idea of free will versus determinism, questioning whether they have any control over their own lives or if they are merely pawns in a larger cosmic game (Millgate, 2011). This existential angst is exemplified in the character of Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, who wrestles with the idea that his actions are predetermined and that he is powerless to change his fate (Hardy, 2003).

Furthermore, Hardy's portrayal of fate and coincidence raises questions about the meaning and purpose of life. If human lives are governed by forces beyond their control, what is the point of striving for happiness or success? These questions reflect the existential dilemma faced by many of Hardy's characters and resonate with readers who grapple with similar issues in their own lives.

### **C. Comparison with Other Philosophical Works**

Hardy's treatment of determinism and chance in his works can be compared to other philosophical works that explore similar themes. For example, the concept of fate in Hardy's works echoes the Stoic idea of fate as an impersonal force that governs the universe (Cox, 2013). Similarly, his portrayal of chance aligns with the existentialist notion of the absurd, where life is seen as inherently unpredictable and devoid of inherent meaning.

Additionally, Hardy's works can be compared to the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that individuals are condemned to be free, meaning that they are responsible for their own choices and actions despite the absence of any predetermined meaning or purpose in life (Ray, 2017). This existentialist perspective resonates with Hardy's portrayal of characters who struggle to find meaning and agency in a seemingly indifferent universe.

## **CRITICAL RECEPTION AND INTERPRETATIONS OF FATE AND COINCIDENCE IN THOMAS HARDY'S WORKS**

Thomas Hardy's works, known for their intricate narratives and exploration of human fate, have been the subject of extensive critical analysis. This essay provides an overview of critical perspectives on fate and coincidence in Hardy's works, analyzes key criticisms and interpretations, and traces the evolution of scholarly thought on fate and coincidence in Hardy's works.

### **A. Overview of Critical Perspectives**

Critical perspectives on fate and coincidence in Hardy's works have been varied, reflecting the complexity of his narratives. Some critics view fate as a central theme in Hardy's works, arguing that his characters are

often at the mercy of external forces beyond their control (Millgate, 2011). Others interpret fate in Hardy's works as a metaphor for the deterministic nature of human life, highlighting the ways in which individuals are shaped by their circumstances (Morgan, 2004).

Coincidence in Hardy's works has also been a point of contention among critics. Some argue that Hardy's use of coincidence is a flaw in his writing, suggesting that it undermines the realism of his narratives (Langbaum, 2018). Others view coincidence as a deliberate narrative device used by Hardy to highlight the role of chance in human life, adding depth and complexity to his stories (Sloan, 2003).

## **B. Analysis of Key Criticisms and Interpretations**

One key criticism of Hardy's use of fate and coincidence is that it can be overly deterministic, portraying characters as helpless victims of their circumstances (Kramer, 2018). Critics argue that this deterministic worldview can be limiting and overlooks the role of individual agency in shaping one's destiny.

However, other scholars argue that Hardy's portrayal of fate and coincidence is more nuanced than it initially appears. They suggest that while characters in Hardy's works may be subject to external forces, they also have the capacity to make choices that can alter their fate to some extent (Ingham, 2015). This interpretation highlights the complexity of Hardy's characters and the ways in which they navigate the challenges of their lives.

## **C. Evolution of Scholarly Thought**

Scholarly thought on fate and coincidence in Hardy's works has evolved over time, reflecting changing attitudes towards determinism and free will. Early critics tended to view Hardy's works through a deterministic lens, emphasizing the role of fate in shaping human lives (Ray, 2017). However, more recent scholarship has taken a more nuanced approach, recognizing the interplay between fate and free will in Hardy's narratives.

Additionally, there has been a growing appreciation for Hardy's use of coincidence as a narrative device. Scholars now recognize that coincidence in Hardy's works serves a thematic purpose, highlighting the unpredictable nature of life and the ways in which seemingly random events can have profound consequences (Cox, 2013).

In summary, critical reception and scholarly interpretations of fate and coincidence in Thomas Hardy's works have been varied, reflecting the complexity of his narratives. While some critics have viewed fate and coincidence in Hardy's works as overly deterministic, others have recognized the nuance and depth of his portrayal of these themes. Overall, Hardy's exploration of fate and coincidence continues to provoke thought and debate among scholars and readers alike, highlighting the enduring relevance of his works.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to HalaJoma'a & Abu-Snoubar (2018) Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) paved the way for modernism. His writings reflect the core of the modernist era that covered the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Shaped by the rapid growth of the industrial societies and the panic of the First World War,



modernism is the age of experimenting with everything. Among other features, modernism concerns with fatalism; the continuity of time. The present paper sheds light on the writings of Thomas Hardy as he experiences in his writings his different viewpoints of the continuity of time and the indifferent attitude of time, taking "The Convergence of the Twain" and "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?" as a models to be discussed.

Sharma (2023) stated that Thomas Hardy strikes as one of the most gifted and remarkable novelists of the Victorian period. Although there is a segment of critics who charges him with frivolous remarks that he was a novelist who was pessimistic to a great extent and did not any ray of hope for his central characters in most of his novels. However, the fact is he offered variety of contents for society to churn over. Hence this paper deals with his two epical novels *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of D'Urberville* and his treatment of the concept of fate with respect to Henchard and Tess, the principal characters of these novels respectively. He takes into his stride all possible situations to prove his point that fate governs every action of human being.

Olaniyan (2018) evaluated that Disillusionment is one of the major thematic thrusts of literary enterprise from the time immemorial. This foregrounds the fact that man's disillusionment is ontological. The study investigates the trope of disillusionment in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. The paper reveals different struggles that Jude, the eponymous character, passes through. Through Hardy's explicit portrayal of life in Victorian society, Hardy condemns human institutions which endlessly perpetuate people in suffering, castration of hopes and limit them socio-politically. In spite of his legitimate and lofty dreams, Jude dies like a dog. Moreover, social factor responsible for the abortion of Jude's ambitions and ruination of his destiny are emphasized in the study. The literary relevance of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is not limited to the Victorian period which was the time when he wrote. This assertion is based on the fact that Hardy has fictionalized the struggle of the common man in the face of helplessness. Thus, the narrative has universal and timeless significance. Disillusioned protagonist is a recurrent figure in much of the twentieth century English fiction. The trope of disillusionment is an attempt to depict the hopelessness, confusion, frustration, alienation, disintegration and estrangement of modern man.

As per Priya and Varadharajan (2021) Destiny includes what will occur, what needs to occur, or what is intended to be. On the off chance that a specific future is supposed to .be somebody's Destiny, it can imply that it's ordained to occur, or that it ought to occur. Destiny is frequently thought to be out of our control, however a few people trust you can control your own fate. Destiny generally alludes to a particular future or result that outcomes from a foreordained or inescapable course of occasions. The word can likewise allude to the course of occasions itself or to the force or power thought to make such things occur. Fate is now and then exemplified—spoke to personally, for example, a goddess who has the ability to decide the course of occasions throughout everyday life. At the point when utilized thusly, it is frequently promoted. Hardy is a fatalist. As indicated by him of possibility, mishap and coincidence. Hardy feels that the normal happens seldom; the unforeseen happens cause the characters to put them in the odd circumstance from which they have to no real way to get out. . It is true that *Far From the Madding Crowd* is less tragic and the only one of Hardy's Wessex novels published in 1874 which is allowed to have a cheerful consummation', yet the terrible components much exceed the last compromise.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study relies primarily on a comprehensive review and analysis of secondary sources, including scholarly articles, literary criticism, and biographical studies, to explore the theme of fate and coincidence in Thomas Hardy's works. The methodology involves a thematic analysis of key works such as "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," "The Mayor of Casterbridge," and selected poems, focusing on how fate and coincidence are depicted and their impact on character development and narrative structure.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Thomas Hardy's exploration of the imperium of fate and coincidence stands as a testament to his profound understanding of the human condition. Through his richly textured narratives and complex characters, Hardy invites readers to confront the inexorable forces that shape our lives and the unpredictable nature of existence itself. Whether viewed through a deterministic lens or interpreted as a commentary on the vagaries of chance, the themes of fate and coincidence in Hardy's works continue to captivate audiences and provoke thought-provoking discussions to this day.

This review paper has provided a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of fate and coincidence in Hardy's literary universe, drawing from a diverse array of secondary sources to illuminate their significance and implications. As we continue to grapple with life's uncertainties, Hardy's timeless meditations on the imperium of fate and coincidence serve as a poignant reminder of the fragility of human existence and the enduring power of storytelling to illuminate the depths of the human soul.

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