

Tis in ourselves that  
we are thus or thus –  
shakespeare –  
othello, act 1 scene 3

Law



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The concept of fate and destiny has fascinated humans for centuries. The idea that our lives are preordained and 'set in the stars' has seemed to be an easy stance to take on one's life, especially when it does not take us in the route we desire. The Greeks were a nation obsessed with fate and created myths such as Oedipus and The Fates to illustrate the outer powers that control our lives. These ideas have of course been continued throughout history and helped to shape our views on the true control that we hold over our future.

Even in today's society of an ever-expanding work place with greater opportunities, we are constantly reminded of a fate like control whether it is from a religious influence or daily horoscopes. Hardy himself was obsessed with fate and it is a theme that runs throughout many of his texts such as 'Far From the Madding Crowd' and 'Mayor of Casterbridge'. It is this fixation with a predetermined layout of our lives that begs me to question the fact as to whether the character Jude is in fact destined to fail, no matter how hard he works or how pious he behaves.

It seems that Jude's family history hides the preordained life planned out for him, with marriage a dark mystery never to be entered into lightly, if at all. McCourt also has to struggle not only past his own family's history in the USA but also a society that seems to seal his fate as a low class Catholic Irishman wanting to better himself academically, as with Jude. So how can such similar characters that face such comparable lives end up with completely different outcomes? Is it fate at work or merely a case of stronger and weaker personalities with less or greater determination?

With such similar tales to tell but ultimately different endings it is easy to suggest that fate has 'chosen' different paths for the two of our characters. Both McCourt and Jude seek to better themselves from the lower class upbringings they both share. McCourt lived not only through the poverty but the 'pompous priests', the 'shiftless loquacious alcoholic father', the 'pious defeated mother' and the 'bullying school masters'. McCourt's early life in New York consisted of living in squalor with rags as clothes and sour milk as his food.

After the death of his younger sister the McCourt family's problems seem to increase with his father's alcoholism reappearing and his mother's depression reaching new heights. It was often left to neighbours to clean and feed McCourt and his siblings as lack of money caused Angela and Malachy, McCourt's parents, the inability to provide the necessities for their children. The back setting of the American Depression, which is mentioned on various occasions, sets the context and helps to explain why the McCourt family is so poor aside from the wasted money on alcohol by the father.

Jude's childhood as an orphan raised by his working class great Aunt is also one of low class stigmata's, although the poverty is not there as within McCourt's memoirs. Jude appears to live a comfortable life with the necessities but never any of the riches that high or even middle class families may enjoy. Class division is a theme that runs through both novels and is a problem that both McCourt and Jude face throughout their lives. It is not until the move back to Limerick in Ireland and as Frank McCourt has aged that any class distinction becomes noticeable to the young McCourt.

Because of the low class status Jude and McCourt hold as youths both characters find that they are unfairly denied many opportunities even though they both have the intelligence and eagerness to learn. Religion also plays a large role in both McCourt and Jude's life, but neither character is shown the mercy and lenity that the Church is supposed to offer its followers. Jude Fawcely wishes to join the church as it is seen as an academically significant career. The rejection Jude faces from his ecclesiastical betters in Christminster lead him to in turn dismiss the church and its beliefs.

Jude finds himself in a 'chaos of principles... groping in the dark... acting by instinct and not after example'. Hardy's novel is brimming with biblical allusions and quotations, yet it portrays a world in which displays of religious belief are largely a 'luxury of the emotional and leisured classes'. Religion also has a large influence over the actions of Frank McCourt. It is also the Church that prevents McCourt having the opportunity to further his education as the Church runs his local Catholic grammar school, and due to his slum like appearance they reject him.

As a child McCourt is in constant fear of the Church, its clergy, Hell and God. The Church is meant to be a service of guidance, but to McCourt its ideas conflict with his own feelings and emotions. For a long time during McCourt's life he feels that he is already condemned to an eternity in hell. These feelings grew from his experiences, McCourt feels guilty about his own sexual feelings and actions, as well as any other small sin any young child would be likely to commit.

McCourt's image of the Church is only increased when he returns to America and is propositioned by a priest on his first night. McCourt is left with the feeling that 'God torments you'. Family history is a large problem that haunts both characters in these novels. Jude is placed under the impression that there is a curse on his family that prevents any successful marriage. His own parents ended up dead, which is seen due to their marriage, and his great Aunt has stayed away from marriage all her life, " The Fawleys were not made for wedlock: it never seemed to sit well upon us".

It is true that Jude's first marriage to Arabella Donn is a failure, however it is not the statute of marriage that seems to be the problem for Jude as even Sue Brideshead's avoidance of marriage can not prevent the ultimate failure of their partnership. It can also be said that the lower class upbringing Jude had been given by his Aunt led to the demise of any hopes Jude may have held to gaining a further education and career within the church.

McCourt also holds some demons from his families past that he carries with him throughout his childhood and that surface during his adult life as well. The 'curse of the Irish' is one that follows McCourt to America with him. His own Father's drinking problem that cast the McCourt family into poverty, is continued by a depressed Frank McCourt who believes he is failing in his dreams. McCourt always feels like an outsider in the same way that Jude always feels an inferior in the city of Christminster to the intellectuals that surround him.