

Victims Of Civilization

Szerző dezs

Angol érettségi tétel

Victims
Of Civilization

There is a remarkable coincidence between Dickens's Great Expectations and Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles if we compare the life stories of the heroes. Both Pip and Tess come from simple, decent rural families and eventually both of them fall victim to civilization, even if their personalities develop in completely different ways meanwhile. Society could change Pip and thereby destroy his illusions, but it could not change Tess, only destroy her. However, we can consider the two novels as different interpretations of the same phenomenon through different characters.

The reason why they have to take the first steps on the road towards destiny is seemingly different: Pip is driven to the city that corrupts him by his great expectations, while Tess has to meet his seducer because of the poverty of her family. But there is also a similarity if we consider that both Pip and Tess were persuaded to leave home by their families, since both of them had debts towards them: Tess accidentally killed the horse of the family, while Pip, the orphan was brought up by his sister. It is his sister's acquaintances who first talk to Pip about his great expectations and make him long for an imaginary world. Unlike him, Tess has misgivings about her visit at the noble 'relatives' and this premonition suggests that by entering a different world she will become exposed to something evil. We could say that her tragedy represents the damage caused by the coming of industrialism to the countryside, while Pip's failure demonstrates the distortion of values in capitalist society.

The first encounter with the rich results in similar experiences in both cases. Miss Havisham, who stuck in time, is just as cranky as Alec's mother, Mrs d'Urberville with her obsession about

her birds. Both Pip and Tess are absolutely helpless and exposed to the people who will mean destiny to them: Estella and Alec. Pip becomes corrupted by this world of illusions the very first time he gets in touch with it: he tells lies to his family when they are enquiring about his experiences.(1) Nevertheless, he wants to go back to Mrs Havisham's house, because he is attracted by Estella, while Tess finds Alec repulsive and she would like to keep away from him.

After he has moved to town, Pip's corruption is getting more advanced. He feels ashamed of Joe when his step-father visits him, because he fails to see the real human values behind the rough appearance. He is surrounded by an artificial world, but he cannot appreciate Joe's being real and natural any more. He does not know either that his benefactor is not Mrs Havisham, but Magwitch, the convict, who is in fact also the father of Estella, the woman of his dreams. For Pip it is really hard to be grateful to someone who has been expelled out of society, he does not understand that things are not always what they seem. He will only realize how wrong he was when it is too late. (2)

Tess, on the other hand, never forgets about her family and always helps them: she gives them the money she received from Clare when they have to mend the roof, even if she herself is destitute too. She realizes straight away that Alec's reformation is not for real, because unlike Pip, she can see everybody's real face behind the mask. She has a clear sense of how to reject whatever fanatic or pious nonsense comes her way: she baptizes her own child when the vicar refuses to do it. She does remain a pure woman despite the fact that she murders Alec in the end, while Pip remains corrupted by society, even if he did his best to save Magwitch, his real benefactor. It does not really matter whether Pip gets Estella in the end or not, for this cannot be what he was previously dreaming about. The only thing that remains him to find delight in is work. (3)

Tess's fate is in strong connection with his father's obsession with their noble origins. Out of remorse and guilt for killing the family horse, she agrees to her mother's scheme that she visit the rich

Trantridge d’Urbervilles who will make her fortune. She does not know that these ‘cousins’ are not authentic offshoots of the aristocratic line, but a nouveau rich family who have bought their way into the gentry and only use the noble name as a kind of decoration. (4) These people, especially Alec, represent the new destructive force of capitalism. Alec d’Urberville thinks he can buy everything, he thinks he has got the right to violate Tess, just because he is higher in the social hierarchy than she is. Tess’s noble origins, the past does not mean anything any more, it cannot save her from her worthless seducer.

Social conventions make Tess an outcast after she gives birth to an illegitimate child and she has to run away from her past. However, her conscience cannot rest and when she could eventually find happiness as the wife of Angel Clare, she decides to reveal her secret to him. Angel, who so far seemed to be a liberal, broad-minded person turns into a conservative hypocrite when he has heard his wife’s story.(5) He cannot ignore Victorian morals, the social conventions of his age and thereby he ruins Tess. His behaviour is the result of generations of ultra-Christian training, which had left in him an inherent aversion to the female, and to all in himself that pertained to the female. What he, in his Christian sense, conceived of as Woman, was only the servant and attendant and administering spirit to the male. He had no idea that there was such a thing as positive Woman, as the Female, another great living Principle counterbalancing his own male principle. He conceived the world as consisting of One, the male principle. And Tess knew that, unconsciously. (6)

Unlike Pip, she could live through all these disasters without giving up her original purity. For Hardy she embodies the qualities of affection and trust, the powers of survival and suffering, which a woman can bring to the human enterprise. Though subjected to endless indignities, assaults and defeats, Tess remains a figure of harmony. She comes to seem for us the potential of what life could be, Tess is Hardy’s greatest tribute to the possibilities of human existence. A victim of civilization and, at the same time, one of the greatest triumphs of civilization: a natural girl. (7)

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