



The Invisible Tragedy: Exploring Slow Violence in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

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ABSTRACT

Slow violence is a critical concept that examines the gradual, often invisible forms of harm that accumulate over time, affecting individuals and communities in ways that are structurally embedded and socially reinforced. Within this framework, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence emphasizes how long-term environmental, social, and economic pressures produce profound consequences that are frequently overlooked. Although scholars have explored *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in relation to Victorian morality, gender, and class, there is a noticeable gap in research applying Nixon's concept of slow violence to Hardy's novel. This study addresses that gap by employing a qualitative textual analysis to examine the cumulative effects of social, economic, moral, and environmental pressures on Tess Durbeyfield. The analysis reveals that Tess's tragedy is not the result of isolated or dramatic events but emerges from the persistent interplay of poverty, sexual exploitation, patriarchal norms, and societal judgment. These interwoven pressures produce psychological and emotional trauma, constrain Tess's autonomy, and gradually erode her dignity and sense of self. By demonstrating how slow violence operates both structurally and internally within Tess's life, the study highlights the novel's critique of Victorian society and underscores the relevance of Nixon's framework in literary analysis. This research thus affirms the utility of slow violence as a lens for understanding the invisible, accumulative forces that shape human experience and narrative tragedy.

1. Introduction

Literary theory is defined as a set of principles and frameworks used to interpret, analyze, and understand literary texts. According to Brewton (2002), it is a collection of ideas and methods applied in the practical reading of literature. Literary theory provides tools to examine the ideological, social, and structural dimensions embedded within texts (Eagleton, 2011). Literature is not a neutral medium; it often reflects social hierarchies, power relations, and cultural ideologies. Literary theory, therefore, plays a significant role in uncovering these underlying themes and structures, offering insight into the social and moral forces shaping the text (Culler, 2002). There is a wide range of literary theories used for textual analysis, including Formalism, Structuralism, Marxism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Ecocriticism (Barry, 2020). Each theory offers a distinctive lens for interpreting literature and understanding the mechanisms of human experience represented in texts.

Slow violence is a critical theory that examines gradual, often imperceptible forms of harm that accumulate over time, producing significant consequences for individuals and communities. According to Nixon (2011), slow violence contrasts with

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immediate, spectacular events, as its effects are incremental, structural, and largely invisible. It manifests in social, economic, environmental, and moral contexts, producing long-term suffering that is rarely recognized as violence in conventional terms (Nixon, 2011). While scholars have applied slow violence primarily in environmental and socio-political studies (e.g., Nixon, 2013; Oppermann, 2013), its application to literary texts remains limited. Yet, literary narratives, particularly those depicting social injustice and structural oppression, provide fertile ground for exploring the concept of slow violence (Gilmore, 2002).

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) is a significant literary text that lends itself to this framework. The novel narrates the life of Tess Durbeyfield, a young woman constrained by poverty, patriarchal norms, moral scrutiny, and sexual exploitation (Hardy, 1891/2004; Shires, 1999). Hardy's narrative illustrates that Tess's suffering is not the result of isolated or dramatic events but emerges gradually from intersecting social, economic, and moral pressures (Levine, 2008). Nixon's framework provides a lens through which these cumulative, invisible forces can be analyzed, highlighting the long-term and systemic nature of oppression experienced by Tess.

Although Hardy's novel has been widely studied in terms of Victorian morality (e.g., Boumelha, 1982), class struggle (Ebbatson, 2004) and gender inequality (e.g., Torgerson, 2003), there remains a gap in research applying Nixon's theory of slow violence to the text. Existing scholarship tends to focus on Tess's individual victimization or romantic tragedy without addressing the gradual and structural nature of her suffering (Morgan, 2005). This study addresses that gap by applying Nixon's concept of slow violence to analyze Tess's life, exploring how poverty, sexual exploitation, patriarchal control, social judgment, and environmental factors cumulatively shape her tragedy.

The aim of this research is to examine how slow violence operates within *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, both in terms of structural pressures and psychological consequences. By investigating the interplay of social, economic, moral, and environmental factors, this study seeks to demonstrate that Tess's tragedy is a product of persistent, invisible forces rather than isolated incidents.

1.1. Problem Statement

A literary text is a complex structure in which social, moral, and structural forces are often embedded, creating subtle, long-term effects on characters and narratives that may be overlooked by readers. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* contains intricate depictions of cumulative suffering, oppression, and societal constraints that are not always visible in a single dramatic event. Despite the extensive scholarship on Hardy's novel, there is no research available that applies Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence to analyze the gradual and invisible pressures affecting Tess Durbeyfield. Therefore, this study aims to apply Nixon's concept of slow violence to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to examine the presence, nature, and function of gradual structural, social, economic, moral, and psychological forces within the text.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To examine how social, economic, moral, and psychological forces shape Tess's life in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.
- To explore the relevance of slow violence in analyzing cumulative and invisible oppression in the novel.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How do poverty, exploitation, patriarchy, and societal judgment impact Tess's life and autonomy?
2. How does slow violence help explain the invisible, long-term oppression in Hardy's novel?

2. Literature Review

The main themes of poverty, gender oppression, Victorian morality, and social critique are developed in Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), which reveals a tragic life of Tess Durbeyfield in strictly class and patriarchal society. The theory of literature allows analyzing the underlying social, economic, and moral pressures that influence the life of the characters and that can manifest the cumulative harms which can be not traced in the instant events (Hardy, 1891/2004; Eagleton, 2011; Nixon, 2011).

The work by Boumelha is based on the portrayal of Hardy on the Victorian society, the moral rules, gender roles, and economic inequalities that limit Tess. She says that Hardy criticizes the vindictive nature of Victorian social order, in which the expectations of society are organized to restrict the independence of Tess and determine her destiny. The work by Bouquelha emphasizes Hardy on social critique but mostly treats the issue of oppression as individual instances as opposed to being a cumulative process.

Elaine Showalter uses a feminist perspective on Tess, which makes her a victim of the male trap. Showalter studies the way the Victorian gender norms marginalize women and punish them disproportionately in transgressions- real or imagined. Her

examination places Tess in the overall context of systemic oppression of women, which offers an understanding of the gendered power structures, but does not quite address the accumulative, slow impact of such pressures throughout her life (Showalter, 1999).

Morgan offers Marxist interpretation of Tess with the focus on the class struggle and rural labor. He describes the Talbothays Dairy work of Tess and her ostracism later on as manifestations of structural inequalities and how both economic and social forces constrain her opportunities. Morgan emphasizes that Tess was helpless materially and socially, but his analysis focuses on episodic inequalities instead of the progressive nature of disadvantages (Morgan, 2006).

Ebbatson (2004) examines *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* through the lens of class relations, arguing that Hardy presents class not merely as background but as an active force shaping Tess's vulnerability and limited agency. He demonstrates how Tess's dependence on agricultural labour and her family's precarious economic position exposes her to exploitation and social judgment, particularly in her interactions with men of higher social and economic status. While Ebbatson's analysis effectively foregrounds the role of class inequality in Tess's suffering, it gives comparatively less attention to how class oppression intersects with gendered moral expectations to produce long-term psychological and social trauma

The book by Ingham (2002) discusses the meeting of the feminist points of view, where Tess is marginalized as gendered and socially constructed. Her work focuses on how Tess is dehumanized by the Victorian standards. Ingham contribution to the body of knowledge about social hierarchies offers a deeper insight but falls short of any framework to analyze invisible and long-term oppression (Ingham, 2002).

Shires (2012) explores the ravaging idealism of male authority figures in Victorian fiction, associating predation with the generalized misogyny. She states that the victimization of Tess represents even the concept of social control over women in general, and the role of social judgment in the increase of individual trauma. Although suggesting some light, in the analysis, Shires concentrates on short-term consequences, and less on the long-term psychological and structural consequences (Shires, 2012).

Choudhury (2024) examines *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as a narrative of social injustice and male dominance, focusing on Tess's sexual exploitation by Alec d'Urberville and the consequent marginalization she suffers within Victorian society. The study highlights how patriarchal power structures legitimize both physical and symbolic forms of violence against Tess, reinforcing her social silence and vulnerability. While Choudhury offers a valuable account of gendered oppression and moral injustice, the analysis largely emphasizes immediate social consequences and does not fully account for the cumulative and long-term psychological and structural damage that shapes Tess's identity and fate (Choudhury, 2024).

Shires evaluates the lack of agency that Tess has with her patriarchal rule and how the Victorian codes of social behavior support her marginalization as an outcast. Her work puts the structural forces that control female behavior and morality into perspective, and the experiences that Tess has are fashioned by the strict demands of the society. According to Shires, there is little attention given to the cumulative oppression, even though she focuses on episodic events (Shires, 1999).

Levine explores the emotional trauma of Tess, as well as her sense of guilt, isolation, and internalized shame, stating that they can be attributed to long-term societal and moral pressures. His work puts the degradation of the mental state of Tess in the context of Victorian realism with its focus on the psychological effects of constant betrayals and moral judgment. However, Levine makes the trauma more of an individual than a systemic phenomenon, restricting the cognitive category in explaining the cumulative impact of trauma (Levine, 2008).

Uehara (1993) situates *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* within Hardy's engagement with sensationalism, emphasizing the psychological consequences of moral transgression and social judgment on Tess. He highlights how Tess's sense of guilt and inner degradation emerge as responses to Victorian moral codes rather than personal failure. However, while Uehara provides a nuanced reading of Tess's psychological suffering, his analysis remains primarily focused on individual emotional effects and does not fully explore the structural or long-term systems of social and moral oppression that shape Tess's fate (Uehara, 1993).

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon talks about a concept of slow violence as a cumulative, invisible, and gradual harm. As opposed to spectacular or instantaneous violence, slow violence is progressive, it may not be noticed necessarily, and it disproportionately impacts disempowered groups (Nixon, 2011).

Hussein uses a concept of slow violence by Nixon to an ecocritical work of literature, exploring the degradation of the environment and its consequences to the marginalized groups. His work emphasizes how harm and invisibility of its effects have slowly built up, and this example is useful to analyze the social and psychological oppression in literature (Hussein, 2022).

Nixon uses the slow violence to Animal's people by Indra Sinha, the writing of Ken Saro-Wiwa on the Ogoni and Arundhati Roy on *The God of small things* and proves that it is useful in examining cumulative social, environmental, and psychological damages in postcolonial writing (Nixon, 2011).

The current literature in feminist (Showalter, 1999; Ingham, 2002; Shires, 2012), Marxist (Morgan, 2006; Ebbatson, 2004), and social critique approaches (Boumelha, 1982; Levine, 2008) is strong in its understanding of the immediate tragedies of Tess yet fails to see them as cumulative and structural. In contrast to how Nixon applied to postcolonial texts, the concept of slow violence has not been studied in Hardy scholarship. This paper fills this gap by using the framework by Nixon to explain the long-term, unseen pain of Tess.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using textual analysis to examine Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* through Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence. Qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of the novel's social, economic, moral, psychological, and environmental dimensions, uncovering the cumulative and often invisible pressures shaping Tess Durbeyfield's life. Key passages illustrating poverty, sexual exploitation, patriarchal control, social judgment, and psychological trauma are closely analyzed to identify how these structural and societal forces gradually produce harm. Secondary sources, including scholarly critiques of Hardy's work, are used to support the analysis and provide contextual understanding. This descriptive-analytical approach emphasizes interpretation over quantification, highlighting the gradual, accumulative nature of oppression and demonstrating how slow violence operates both thematically and structurally within the novel.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The concept of slow violence has significantly transformed the understanding of gradual, often imperceptible forms of harm. Rob Nixon invented the concept of slow violence in his seminal book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) to refer to a type of harm that is not immediate or spectacular but occurs over a long period in minute steps. Nixon compares slow violence with traditional concept of violence, which is normally viewed as sudden, explosive and high-profile events. According to his explanation, violence is traditionally understood as something that is immediate in time, bursting and spectacular in space as it bursts into instant sensual display (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Contrary to an instant violence, slow violence is spread across the time, often making it mundane or routine and it is hard to trace the causes or the perpetrators of the damages. Although slow violence may be very subtle, the impact is just as destructive and permanent as direct, dramatic violence.

The intellectual origin of the concept by Nixon lies in the idea of structural violence that was presented by John Galtung in the 1960s. Galtung in his article *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* (1969) defines structural violence as violence as a part of the social system, which is damage in the form of some systemic inequalities, e.g. discrimination based on race, sex, or classes. He observes that there might not be a single individual who will cause harm to another person in the building. The violence is institutionalized in the framework and it appears as disparate power and hence disparate life opportunities (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Most forms of structural violence are highly invisible, unchanging, and institutionalized, and as such, individuals are not able to satisfy their basic needs in life. Nixon builds on the structure of Galtung by putting the emphasis on temporality and gradual accrual of harm and introducing the idea of slow violence as any kind of harm that is accumulated gradually, often across generations, and which takes both an individual and a community shape, which is challenging to identify or directly address.

Nixon states that there are two major attributes of slow violence. First, it is often invisible. This invisibility is facilitated by the fact that the damage is built with time sometimes spanning over one persons life and thus the affected persons are unable to trace the source or cause of the damage. Moreover, the victims of slow violence often become accustomed to it and do not realize it as a violence, as Nixon says, they are normally not considered violence at all (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Second, slow violence is more prevalent among disempowered groups that have no social, economic, or political resources to counteract the effects or prevent them. In this regard, slow violence is cumulative and systemic in that it works silently but with great force to influence the experiences of marginalized groups.

Applying the understanding of the sustained sufferings of Tess Durbeyfield in the context of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the framework offered by Nixon is a worthy way of analyzing her situation. The struggles facing Tess such as poverty, sexual exploitation, patriarchal control and social judgment are cumulative and progressive in nature and they may not be readily noticed by the people around her. Using the concept of slow violence allows seeing how her tragedy is created through systemic and structural pressures, as opposed to the individual cases, which puts into the limelight of the insidious but nonetheless crushing effect of societal oppression on her life.

4. Analysis

Tess of the D'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy describes the hard life of Tess, which was ordered and bound by social, economic and moral pressures. Her pain is slow, implicit and unseen by those who are close to her. The idea of slow violence proposed by Rob Nixon (2011) is very similar to the experiences of Tess, and it is possible to apply this notion to her situation to see how her downfall is the result not of the adverse events but of the long-term structural forces.

4.1. Poor and Class Limitations

Economic factors significantly influence the life path that Tess goes through. Hardy does not just give a background of poverty, but it is a living, almost determining force that determines the possibilities of Tess, the relationships she has and how much freedom she has.

If the heads of the Durbeufield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them

Financial difficulties in the D'Urberville family also force Tess to find employment at Talbothays Dairy and this move, even though it is necessary, proves how poverty is slowly limiting her agency. For example, Tess's decision to leave home and work at Talbothays after her family's continued hardship reflects this compulsion. In this respect, the decision to work is not a mere practicality on the part of Tess but a sort of submission to the socio-economic systems that constrain her possibilities. The economic scarcity of Hardy in the description of Tess anticipates the functioning of systemic deprivation as quietly, cumulatively, as Rob Nixon (2011) predicts of slow violence. Poverty is not a dramatic situation; it is a long-term and unnoticed problem the outcomes of which are formed over years and gradually determine the life of a person and his or her social status.

The social life and movement of Tess is also affected by her economic constraint. Her rural working-class position limits with whom she can have an association, with whom she can get married, and with whom other people can see her or not. On this case, to demonstrate how the inequality is perpetuated by the structure of classes, Hardy points out the difference between Tess and the more affluent characters, like aristocratic d'Urbervilles. Alec d'Urberville's affluent position as a faux gentleman starkly opposes Tess's rural destitution; he employs her at his estate, wielding power from his "monumental" status while her family lacks resources. Pedigree without "Victorian lucre" offers Tess no advantage, as seen when she fails to attract a dance partner despite her lineage. Alec invokes his superiority in The Chase, calling her a "mere chit" before the assault, highlighting his economic and physical dominance. The power imbalance that is brought about by wealth and social status helps Tess to be involved in the encounters between her and Alec d'Urberville who takes advantage of her vulnerability Alec's control over transport, shelter, and money places Tess in a dependent position. In this regard, poverty is not just a deprivation in terms of materials but also a deprivation in terms of social subordination. The fact that Tess cannot fight off the advances of Alec or claim her own independence, serves as a measure of the structural forces involved, which are slow, accumulable and are not always noticeable by the observer.

Moreover, Hardy shows how poverty puts pressure on the psyche and material limits. Tess is ashamed, insecure, and fearful about her social status and these factors shape her choices and relationships throughout the novel. Tess's repeated self-doubt and silence about her past reflect this psychological burden. This judgment is internalized by the society that identifies worth with economic achievement, and she becomes a target to both external reproach and internalized guilt. The theory of slow violence that Nixon has developed is especially applicable in this case: the violence that Tess is forced to endure does not only manifest itself in her work and social restrictions but also in the unseen tactics in which it influences her psyche, her sense of self, and her agency. The violence of poverty builds up gradually, silently becoming incorporated into her thoughts and actions, and creating long-term outcomes that cannot be as notorious as dramatic events like sudden accidents or crimes but no less fatal.

Another way that Hardy depicts poverty is as an agent that directs Tess to predestined directions, e.g., domestic work and farming service. Tess repeatedly finds herself confined to labour intensive rural work. Her employment at Talbothays Dairy, which might appear paradise at first, opens her insecurities, such as being exposed to the society and becoming a victim. Even in this seemingly peaceful environment, Tess remains socially and economically vulnerable. The systematic anticipations of workers in the Victorian society are an indication of the wider societal processes that impose the definition of classes and restrict mobility. The life of Tess in her daily routine is defined by slow but unending fight to survive and this explains how economic oppression a systemic manifestation of slow violence is. The sufferings of poverty are accrued over a period, which gradually limits the options, defines the relationships, and ultimately makes Tess prone to being victimized and judged by society.

Besides, the invisibility of the effects of poverty is highlighted in the story by Hardy. Although it might seem that Tess works hard and lives a simple life and this is not remarkable or amazing to others, it contains the insidious, rotting influence on her future. Her constant labour is normalized and unnoticed by society. Every minor financial setback, every lacked chance, every compelled choice to work, is a way to eradicate her potential, like an invisible thinning of the air. According to Nixon (2011), the principle of slow violence is that it accumulates, is gradual and in many cases, goes unnoticed until its impacts become irresistible. Poverty has a long-term effect in the case of Tess which is combined with other sources of structural oppression such as gendered expectations and moral judgment, which increases her vulnerability and strengthens the tragic course of the novel.

Lastly, the story of Tess brings out the wider social connotation of poverty during the Victorian era. Hardy is critiquing a social system that creates inequalities on the basis of classes, and financial disparity, showing that this structural aspect has far-reaching effects that reach way beyond the instantaneous material destitution. The struggles which Tess faces are not due to personal ineffectiveness or the single cases but are based on the ongoing pressures of an inflexible socio-economic order. In the life of Tess, Hardy depicts that poverty is a kind of silent, extensive violence slow, cumulative, and ultimately destructive, which supports the argument made by Nixon that structural disadvantages can be more detrimental in the long run than acute, visible disasters.

The situation that Tess is facing of poverty and limitation of classes is a classic example of slow violence, both at an individual and societal level. Her limited options, the weight of mental load, and vulnerability to manipulation are a manifestation of the effects of mutual economic deprivation. Hardy, through the novel, is thus not only narrating the life of a suffering person but also condemning a larger social structure that has been perpetrating the same form of invisible, incremental damage, showing the hidden human side of poverty and inequality of classes.

4.2. Sexual Exploitation and Its Lingering Consequences

The fact that Tess was sexually exploited by Alec d'Urberville is an example of the personal and social slow violence. For example, Alec's manipulation of Tess in the Chase, where she is left powerless and unaware, initiates this exploitation. This violation does not show as a single and dramatic event but as the start of a prolonged series of physical, emotional, and social effects that will echo through the life of Tess. The attack is direct and perceptible but has the most critical impacts that are indirect, cumulative and invisible which fits the definition of slow violence introduced by Rob Nixon (2011) where harm is built up over time, usually unnoticed before it becomes visible. The experience of Tess shows that sexual violence is not necessarily spectacular and publicly visible; its long-term consequences are wormy and hidden in social order, individual consciousness, and interpersonal relationships.

Hardy depicts the victimization of Tess as the tragedy of many levels. At the individual level, the act of assault of Alec diminishes the feeling of autonomy and bodily integrity that Tess experiences. After the incident, Tess repeatedly describes herself as "impure" and undeserving of happiness. The fact that she cannot oppose or retaliate reveals the power inequality between them in terms of their social and economic roles- she is a poor, rural girl, Alec on the other hand is a rich, educated and influential person. Alec's wealth, status, and confidence contrast sharply with Tess's dependency and silence. This imbalance increases the pace of the violence which is slow and lasting as Tess is helpless to stop the effects which befall her in her life. It is both one action and at the same time, its emotional and psychological consequences are long-term: she carries with her a sense of shame, self-blame and contaminations, which affect her actions, choices, and her view of herself. According to Boumelha (1982) and Showalter (1999), this type of cumulative trauma is an example of the delayed, protracted damage that slow violence represents, and the life of Tess gives a literary example of this theory.

The effect of the exploitation by Alec is not limited to the ordeal Tess experiences in her life as it spreads into her relationships with other people. This is most clearly seen in Angel Clare's rejection of Tess after her confession. The fact that she eventually became alienated by Angel Clare, which was partly caused by the disclosure of her past, shows the interaction between sexual violence and the social judgment and moral expectation. The codes of female purity were strictly enforced by the Victorian society and organized the relationships and social value. Tess is not to be blamed of any wrongdoing per se but the outcomes of her victimization. Despite being a victim, Tess bears the moral consequences imposed by society. Hardy criticizes such a moral firmness and demonstrates how the effects of sexual exploitation are transformed into a lasting social penalty by societal pressure. This is structural slow violence, in the meaning of Nixon: the very structure of society acts to impose cumulative damage, which adds to the personal anguish of Tess over time.

Hardy also stresses the unseen, silent psychological burden that Tess carries with her. Even after leaving Alec, Tess continues to fear his presence and influence. Although nobody knows what happened to her, the fear of being abused by Alec still haunts her feelings, her choice and self-esteem. The legacies of the trauma are reflected in the way Tess works at Talbothays Dairy, how she interacts with her family, and how she is trying to make peace with Angel. Her moments of happiness are repeatedly

interrupted by anxiety and guilt. This progressive buildup of damage is an indication of how slow violence does not act as a catastrophic occurrence but through gradual, mostly invisible influences. The life of Tess turns out to be the testament of the malicious means of inflicting the long-run trends of the sexual exploitation, which have the socially enforced and internally perceived implications.

The gender and class aspect of slow violence also comes out clearly through the societal aspect of the suffering that Tess undergoes. Tess is a vulnerable woman, who is poor and of working-class: she is sexually exploited due to her gender, but her economic status denies her the possibility of taking any action. For instance, Tess's silence after Alec's exploitation reflects both her gendered vulnerability and her lack of social power. The way that Alec can manipulate and dominate her is indicative of structural inequalities of the Victorian society, where wealth, social status, and patriarchal control interfere to limit the life of women like Tess. The story Hardy tells shows that the damage caused by the sexual exploitation does not tend to be limited in space to the time when the abuse took place; it permeates over years, forming the identity in society, influencing the ethical judgment and personal destiny in a subtle and devastating way.

Moreover, this novel is also an indication that the experience of Tess is a wider comment on the societal machinery that facilitates such malevolence. The culture of the Victorian with its strict moral paradigm and gender roles turns personal violence into lasting social and psychological impacts. Tess's treatment by society after confession illustrates her moral rigidity. The events of the encounter between Alec and a series of suffering are triggered by the assault which is intensified and supported by social attitudes and moralistic judgment, which is an example of how sexual violence can be used to combine with structural oppression to create a slow, cumulative damage. Angel Clare's rejection of Tess reinforces this social punishment. This is congruent with the fact that, as argued by Nixon, slow violence usually goes unnoticed and it can be experienced over time under a social, economic, and moral order as opposed to dramatic occurrences.

The sexual exploitation done to Tess is a depiction of the notion of slow violence on both the individual and social levels. The way Hardy has depicted her victimization shows how the effects of abuse cannot be seen at once but grow over time impacting relationships, social status, and psychological health. Tess's Continued fear, guilt, and loss of agency illustrate this gradual impact. This trauma of Tess reminds us of the sinister quality of both sexual and structural oppression and how, in the long-term, covert harm can cause far more significant effects than violence can. Using the life of Tess, Hardy criticizes the society that contributes and enhances cumulative damage in the name of moral propriety to demonstrate the long-term and widespread consequences of sexual exploitation and social judgment. Tess becomes a victim not only of Alec, but of the moral system itself.

4.3. Patriarchy and Social Judgment

The clear restriction in agency of Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is a response to the strict codes of morality and patriarchy that guided the Victorian society where women were very tightly controlled and their actions, especially concerning sexuality were highly evaluated. Tess's worth is constantly measured through ideals of purity rather than her intentions or character. Hardy depicts a social world where virtue is very narrowly mentioned, and the outcome of perceived breaches is grossly unequal in relation to women. Tess is expected to be subject to constant scrutiny, judging and moralizing, which serve as a systemic manifestation of slow violence, that is, an invisible, cumulative damage that shapes her life through time, and not in a one-drama episode. Tess is continually judged by community standards even when she remains silent about her suffering. Here, the fact that she has been betrayed by Angel Clare is not just a personal betrayal, it is an expression of the unremitting power of social conventions and codes of morality that establish the parameters of feminine conduct. Angel's reflection reflects social expectations rather than personal cruelty alone.

The Victorian moral subjected women to a lot of pressure to practice purity, modesty and obedience. Any kind of deviation, actual or imaginary, would lead to social ostracism, and stigma of lifetime. Tess's past becomes a permanent marker of shame despite her lack of consent. The fact that Tess was earlier victimized by Alec d'Urberville makes moral judgment on her by this victimization the gauge of her own morality, though she is innocent in the situation. Alec's manipulation peaks in *The Chase*: "Tess! said d'Urberville and lay down beside her. The girl was not strong enough to resist him," leaving her powerless. Angel rejects her post-confession, never seeing her slipped letter but later outraged upon learning, reinforcing Victorian moral hypocrisy. Society punishes Tess as morally failed: "*Society equates Tess's victimhood with moral failure,*" measuring her by purity over character, leading to her tragic end from accumulated pressures. Despite victimhood, she bears consequences, blaming herself: "*She was ashamed of herself for her gloom... under an arbitrary law of society.*" This example shows how this moral puritanism can impose prolonged pain, since Tess carries with her the stigmatization of the society and how she finds it difficult to maneuver in a world that does not forgive or accept her experiences. The theory of slow violence suggested by Nixon (2011) is especially helpful in the consideration of this dynamic: the societal judgment acts in an obscure way, building up over time to limit Tess in her choices, cut her off socially, and destroy her dignity and self-esteem. However, as opposed to sudden violence, which is obvious and immediate, the damage Tess experiences as a result of social judgment is long-term, not visible, and structural to the moral framework of her community.

Social structure based on patriarchy in the novel has several consequences. Tess is both directly and indirectly oppressed. She is directly condemned, ostracized, or alienated by those near her like Angel Clare, who at first finds her innocence so beautiful but turns his back on her after finding out about her history. Angel's conditional love reinforces patriarchal standards. The threat of moral censure that is present at all times and that controls her life indirectly shapes the life of Tess and constrains her personal agency as well as plays a role in her decision-making when it comes to love, marriage, and work. Hardy points out to the fact that societal norms carry a psychological load, too: Tess carries in herself the judgment and the shame, which is one of the contributory factors to a long-lasting emotional weight, which shapes her sense of decision-making and of herself. Tess's silence reflects her oppression. This internalized social pressure is an example of how insidious the slow violence can be, in that it does not necessarily occur physically but rather contains a strong psychological and social influence.

Hardy also brings out the intersection of patriarchal and moralistic structures concerning class and gender in order to make Tess more vulnerable. Being a poor, rural woman, she does not have social and economic resources that she could use to defend herself or to fight against the societal judgment. For example, Tess's dependence on manual labour and her lack of family influence leave her with no protection after Alec's exploitation. These factors, when combined with the financial pressure and moral judgment, make her especially vulnerable to accrued violence, which supports the claim by Nixon that slow violence is frequently structural and intersectional. The suffering that Tess endures is not in the case of isolated instances of cruelty but a system that constantly imposes strict norms, restrictions, and excludes those that do not comply. Tess's repeated exclusion from social acceptance reflects this ongoing structural pressure.

The example of how society judges and how this judgment continues to have repercussions is also exhibited in the narrative. The relationships Tess has with other women including Marian and Liza-Lu demonstrate that social norms are far reaching in that even those who are good to her have to negotiate a world in which moral expectation drives their actions. The gossip in the community, the questioning of peers, and the expectation of women being impeccable in their morality all add to the ostracism that Tess experiences. Village gossip and silent suspicion isolate Tess socially. The dynamics that Hardy depicts shows how detrimental, build-up after build-up, a comment, a glance, a judgment appears harmless at its core, but when taken together, comprise an atmosphere of constant surveillance and limitation, eroding the autonomy and self-awareness of Tess in the aggregate.

In addition, Hardy criticizes the society as a whole, which strengthens the power of patriarchy and moralistic domination. He uses Tess to reveal the fact that women are often unfairly penalized because of the situation that they are not at fault in, yet the men, such as Alec d'Urberville, are often not questioned. For example, Alec continues his life without social pressure while Tess bears lifelong consequences. The agony that Tess faces is hence symbolic not merely of individual bad luck, but of institutional unfairness as well. Nixon (2011) claims that slow violence does not work through dramatic situations and events as much as through institutions and social structures and her example of Victorian moral codes is an illustration of this rule. Social judgment is a silent, invisible, and continuous process that creates long-term damage that will define the life path of Tess (Tess's marginalization grows quietly over time).

The social judgment, patriarchal constraint experienced by Tess can be used to illustrate the theory of slow violence at both individual and institutional levels. The novel by Hardy demonstrates the ability of the norms of moralistic and patriarchal society to harm people in an unnoticeable and insidious way, limiting their freedom of choice, burdening mental and psychic resources, and influencing social and personal fate. Tess's internalized shame and reduced sense of self-worth exemplify this harm. The confined agency of Tess, ostracist tendencies, and that of internalized shame shows that the most ruinous forms of violence are not always spectacular or immediate but tend to be long-lasting and cumulative and socially approved. Hardy uses Tess to comment on a society that shapes the moral codes too strictly, promotes the inequality of genders, and tolerates the harm of the system to be that silent and continuous over the years Tess's tragic end reflects the accumulated effects of this social violence.

4.4. Psychological and Emotional Accumulation

Besides structural, economic, and social factors, Tess experiences a type of slow violence, which is psychological. Hardy clearly depicts her inside world, making it sensitive and detailed, she shows how recurrent episodes of betrayal, loss, and marginalization pile up over time to produce long-term trauma. Tess internalizes deep guilt post-assault, viewing herself as impure: *"Her face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess"* after Prince's death, a self-blame pattern extending to her violation. She later tells Angel, *"Once victim, always victim. That's the law,"* reflecting enduring shame despite non-consent. Her silence about the past stems from gendered vulnerability, as she fears social judgment. Tess's betrayal by Alec d'Urberville and later rejection by Angel Clare repeatedly damage her emotional stability. The sufferings that Tess experiences are not necessarily apparent to the outside world but are usually internalized such that they take the form of guilt, anxiety and a feeling of constant vulnerability. Tess often blames herself for events beyond her control. To give an example, even the points of transient joy, like the one at Talbothays Dairy or a moment of reconciliation with Angel Clare is overshadowed

by the fear of being judged and being reminded of the past abuses. This psychological tension persisting is a characteristic of the example of Nixon (2011) where the impacts of slow violence, though unseen, are always transformative and may alter internal consciousness as much as external situations.

The novel puts a lot of focus on the fact that psychological slow violence is cumulative. The combination of events that happened to Tess in her previous life: the fact that she is exploited by Alec, her family is poor, and that society ponders at her moral character creates a complex trauma. Each incident reinforces her sense of shame and emotional exhaustion. The fact that Hardy describes the inner struggles of Tess reveals that harm is not only a topic of external circumstances but also of the longer-term emotional impacts they produce. Tess bears the burden of such pressures without complaint, and this depicts how insidious and long-term a slow violence can be. The build up of emotional stress is a manifestation of the intersection of structural, social, and personal forces to cause long-term sufferings, proving that trauma is usually slow, non-observable, and supported by society. Tess's gradual emotional collapse reflects this accumulated trauma.

4.5. Intersection of Social, Economic, and Moral Pressures

Another way that slow violence does not act alone is evident in Hardy novel. The forces that affect Tess are multifactorial since they include poverty, gender-based exploitation, and social condemnation, which are all combined to make her more vulnerable. Tess's poverty forces her to seek work outside her village, which leads her to Alec d'Urberville. Although all these difficulties might appear insignificant individually, they all contribute to her exclusion and hasten her downfall. Poverty restricts her choices, exploitation compromises her independence, through Alec's misuse of power over her. Social and moral judgments also add to the emotional and psychological damage. Society blames Tess for her past rather than recognizing her victimization. Deloughrey (2019) focuses on the fact that slow violence can manifest itself through such intersections of environmental, social, and structural conditions and lead to the harm which can be subtle, incremental, and long-term transformative.

The life of Tess is a good example of how these competing pressures work in harmony with each other. She is vulnerable to exploitation and judgment due to the lack of economic deprivation and a limitation in her decisions and social mobility. Her poor background gives her little protection or authority in dealing with men like Alec. Her gendered norms subject her to patriarchal regulations and society intensifies her feelings of shame and remorse. This is evident when Angel Clare rejects her after learning about her past. The two types of oppression in question reinforce one another and have a compounding effect that gradually undermines Tess and her independence, dignity, and identity. Each setback weakens her position further. This story by Hardy therefore serves as a good literary explanation of how gradual violence builds up with overlapping social, ethical and economic systems showing that long-term misery is frequently due to a combination of several, unfamiliar forces and not one dramatic incident. Tess's tragic end results from this continues accumulation of pressures.

4.6. Environmental and Symbolic Dimensions of Slow Violence

Hardy also incorporates the idea of slow violence in the natural and rural setting as an extension of the structural and the social pressure that Tess is experiencing. The fact that Tess associates the land, farmwork, dairy work, and seasons of the year shows her subjection and reliance on the forces beyond her power. Tess returns repeatedly to grueling farm work, like at Talbothays Dairy, where her life aligns with nature's rhythms rather than choice, symbolizing economic entrapment. Society normalizes her toil while ignoring her exploitation; rural isolation amplifies vulnerability, with village gossip isolating her. Seasonal labour limits mobility: "*Pedigree... did not help Tess in her life's battle.*" Tess's continuous labour at Talbothays Dairy ties her life to the rhythms of nature rather than personal choice. The slow and inevitability of the weather, the hard work and the lack of control over the environment lend a cry of questioning the harshness of her surrounding conditions, how factors beyond her control exacerbate her feeling of vulnerability. To take an example, Tess does not suffer any dramatic calamity in her backbreaking labour at Talbothays, or in her struggles with agricultural labour but rather is an ongoing, cumulative adversity, which is slowly draining her both physically, emotionally and socially.

The natural environment is brought in becoming a silent observer in the sufferings of Tess, like the invisibility and accumulative form of slow violence. According to Nixon (2011), slow violence sometimes takes place in the background, and it is insensible but very far-reaching. This is enhanced by Hardy rural setting whereby the setting places limitations and burdens on Tess that are neither dramatic in the immediate but determine the path in her life as time goes by, for instance, rural isolation prevents Tess from escaping social judgment or finding alternative opportunities. Moreover, the land works as a symbol and indicates how Tess is trapped in both social and economic systems. Her dependence on agriculture reflects her lack of mobility. Her work in the fields reflects the constant demands of the patriarchal and moralistic standards and her reliance on the external conditions reflects her reliance on the social organization restricting the freedom of action. She must obey both nature and society. In this regard, both the natural and the social world are connected which contributes to the cumulative, invisible violence which defines the life of Tess.

These interrelated dimensions which depict the psychological, social, economic and environmental dimensions help Hardy to present the tragedy of Tess as a consequence of gradual and gradual forces rather than an event. Her pain is slow, diffuse and multi-dimensional developing through repeated labour, judgment, and isolation which reflects the strata of impacts of societal, structural and personal influences which silently, unseen and unrelenting shape her life. The novel shows that pain does not necessarily come fast and in dramatic fashion, the most destructive types of violence can be subtle and build up over a period of time to cause significant, lasting effects.

5. Conclusion

Tess of the D'Urbervilles depicted the life of Tess Durbeyfield as the cumulative impact of poverty, sexual exploitation, patriarchal control and social condemnation and has revealed that it is the long term and systematic oppression that has brought her to her tragedy and not isolated circumstances. The use of the idea of slow violence suggested by Rob Nixon shows that these harms are manifested over time, usually covertly, and are disproportionately experienced by the vulnerable groups of people, which indicates the structural and psychological aspects of suffering Tess experienced. Her experiences show that harm is cumulative, invisible and socially reinforced. This strategy shows that one can gain a better insight into the interaction of social, moral and economic forces when factoring in her life through slow violence where one realizes that the long-term effects of harm may be small, but that are very transformative. Tess's gradual suffering, rather than a single dramatic event, defines the trajectory of her life. The perspective of presenting the experiences of Tess in this manner extends the literary analysis past the immediate disasters, and highlights the importance of long-term, cumulative oppression in character and narrative consequences. Hardy's novel, therefore, exemplifies slow violence in a literary, social, and psychological context.

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