Animals in the novel

Animals appear throughout the novel and can be seen as both symbols of the natural world in which the characters live and symbolic of the fate that befalls Tess.

Look at the following extract and consider the significance (importance) of the words and phrases which have been put in bold and italics:

They were a long way further on than when she had *lost consciousness*, and the waggon had stopped. A hollow groan, unlike anything she had ever heard in her life, came from the front, followed by a shout of 'Hoi there!'

The lantern hanging at her waggon had gone out, but another was shining in her face – much brighter than her own had been. Something terrible had happened. The harness was entangled with an *object which blocked the way*.

In consternation Tess jumped down, and discovered the dreadful truth. The groan had proceeded from her father's poor horse Prince. The morning mailcart, with its *two noiseless wheels, speeding along these lanes like an arrow, as it always did, had driven into her slow and unlighted equipage*. The pointed shaft of the cart had entered the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword, and from *the wound his life's blood was spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road*.

In her despair *Tess sprang forward and put her hand upon the hole*, with the only result that *she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops*. Then she stood *helplessly* looking on. Prince also stood firm and motionless as long as he could; till he *suddenly sank down in a heap*.

By this time the mail-cart man had joined her, and began *dragging and unharnessing* the hot form of Prince. But he was already dead, and, *seeing that nothing more could be done immediately, the mail-cart man returned to his own animal, which was uninjured*.

…

He mounted and sped on his way; while *Tess stood and waited*. The *atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose, and twittered; the lane showed all its white features*, *and Tess showed hers, still whiter*. The huge pool of blood in front of her was already assuming the iridescence of coagulation; and when *the sun rose* a hundred prismatic hues were reflected from it. Prince lay alongside still and stark; his eyes half open, the hole in his chest looking scarcely large enough to have let out all that had animated him.

From: pages 71-72, Penguin Classics edition

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Complete the grid below using the ideas from your discussion. If you have not yet read further on in the novel return to this grid after finishing the book and see if you still have the same ideas or if you are able to add any further thoughts to your initial ideas. The first one has been done as an example:

Evidence (the quotation)	**Analysis (the importance of the words or phrases and what it shows us)**
… lost consciousness	This suggests Tess has no control over going to sleep: it shows her powerlessness to do anything about what happens to her.
The lantern hanging at her waggon had gone out, but another was shining in her face	
… object which blocked the way	
… two noiseless wheels, speeding along these lanes like an arrow, as it always did, had driven into her slow and unlighted equipage.	
… the wound his life's blood was spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road.	
Tess sprang forward and put her hand upon the hole	
… she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops	

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Evidence (the quotation)	Analysis (the importance of the words or phrases and what it shows us)
… helplessly	
… he suddenly sank down in a heap	
… dragging and unharnessing	
… seeing that nothing more could be done immediately, the mail-cart man returned to his own animal, which was uninjured.	
Tess stood and waited	
… atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose, and twittered; the lane showed all its white features, **and** *Tess showed hers, still whiter.*	
… the sun rose	

Now read the next extract, on the following page, from much later in the novel. After reading it, underline or highlight words or phrases that you think might be significant; draw a table like the one above and analyse the words and phrases that you have picked out. Again, you might want to return to your initial ideas after you have finished reading the novel.

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In the midst of these whimsical fancies she heard a new strange sound among the leaves. It might be the wind; yet there was scarcely any wind. Sometimes it was a palpitation, sometimes a flutter; sometimes it was a sort of gasp or gurgle. Soon she was certain that the noises came from wild creatures of some kind, the more so when, originating in the boughs overhead, they were followed by the fall of a heavy body upon the ground. Had she been ensconced here under other and more pleasant conditions she would have become alarmed; but, outside humanity, she had at present no fear.

…

Directly the assuring and prosaic light of the world's active hours had grown strong she crept from under her hillock of leaves, and looked around boldly. Then she perceived what had been going on to disturb her. … Under the trees several pheasants lay about, their rich plumage dabbled with blood; some were dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some staring up at the sky, some pulsating quickly, some contorted, some stretched out – all of them writhing in agony, except the fortunate ones whose tortures had ended during the night by the inability of nature to bear more.

Tess guessed at once the meaning of this. The birds had been driven down into this corner the day before by some shooting-party; and while those that had dropped dead under the shot, or had died before nightfall, had been searched for and carried off, many badly wounded birds had escaped and hidden themselves away, or risen among the thick boughs, where they had maintained their position till they grew weaker with loss of blood in the night-time, when they had fallen one by one as she had heard them.

She had occasionally caught glimpses of these men in girlhood, looking over hedges, or peering through bushes, and pointing their guns, strangely accoutred, a bloodthirsty light in their eyes. She had been told that, rough and brutal as they seemed just then, they were not like this all the year round, but were, in fact, quite civil persons save during certain weeks of autumn and winter, when, like the inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, they ran amuck, and made it their purpose to destroy life – in this case harmless feathered creatures, brought into being by artificial means solely to gratify these propensities – at once so unmannerly and so unchivalrous towards their weaker fellows in Nature's teeming family.

With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess's first thought was to put the still living birds out of their torture, and to this end with her own hands she broke the necks of as many as she could find, leaving them to lie where she had found them till the game-keepers should come – as they probably would come – to look for them a second time.

From: pages 351-353, Penguin Classics edition

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