

Descriptions of Tess

Read through the descriptions below. Discuss, and make notes on, the following:

1. What similarities do you see between the quotations? It is not enough to write, 'She is compared to an animal in each one.' Think about the types of animal and whether it is movements, looks or feelings that are described.
2. Why do you think Hardy has chosen to depict Tess in these various ways? Again, think through your ideas carefully. What is he trying to suggest, if anything?
3. Find other descriptions of Tess in the novel and compare them to these. Look out for patterns in these descriptions and consider what sort of message, if any, Hardy might have wanted to convey.

She soon finished her eating, and ... began to trace imaginary patterns on the tablecloth with her forefinger with the constraint of a domestic animal that perceives itself to be watched. p.176

... and as she listened Tess, like a fascinated bird, could not leave the spot. p.178

She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's. p.231

She went stealthily as a cat through the profusion of growth. p.179

... with lips parted and eyes askance on the labourers, [Tess] wore the look of a wary animal the while. p.259

No object could have looked more foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels than this unsophisticated girl, with the round bare arms, the rainy face and hair, the suspended attitude of a friendly leopard at pause ... p.251

They marked the buoyancy of her tread, like the skim of a bird which has not quite alighted. p.260

... a girl of simple life, not yet one-and-twenty, who had been caught during her days of immaturity like a bird in a springe. p.261

... the words had no serious intent: but she was surcharged with emotion, and winced like a wounded animal. p.285

... and there was something of the habitude of the wild animal in the unreflecting instinct with which she rambled on p.349

Tess, between the Amazons and the farmer like a bird caught in a clap-net p.367

'Now punish me!' she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck. p.411

... her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman. p.487