

Bestiality, Animality,

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Bestiality, Animality,

and Humanity

陈 红 著



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内容摘要

英国诗歌中以威廉姆·布莱克、戴·赫·劳伦斯和特德·休斯为代表的浪漫主义传统视自然界中的野兽和人性中的野性为一种积极的力量。本书聚焦这一传统,是至今第一部完整追溯其发展历程的长篇论著。在对这一传统作出历史回顾的同时,关注其产生及发展的背景,包括自十八世纪后期到二十世纪下半叶期间英国诗歌中对动物尤其是野生动物的不同表现,以及其他非文学的文化层面上和现实社会中所发生的种种改变,比如达尔文理论为人类对自然及自身的认识所带来的强大冲击。论文的核心部分将对劳伦斯和休斯的一些具代表性的动物诗歌做出从内容到形式的细读,并在此基础上提出本文的中心论点,即:诗人们对西方自古希腊以来的文化传统,尤其是基督教传统中对兽性、动物性及人性关系的看法持批判态度。他们认为所谓兽性,不过是人类为自身恶行所找的代名词;自然状态下生存的动物所具有的本能与人类特有的品性均是人类完善自我所必须的条件。诗人们的这一认识构成了他们所承继的浪漫主义传统中一个极其重要的部分。

Foreword

David Parker

From the Greek philosopher Plato onwards, Western philosophical and religious thought has highly valued the spiritual dimension of the human being—as opposed to the physical dimension. Human nature has been presented as a battleground between mind or soul (the “higher” part of man) and the body or flesh, which is mainly pictured as “lower”. Following the Stoic philosophers, moral and spiritual self-mastery in the West has generally been seen in terms of the higher faculties gaining control over the lower—or the so-called “animal” side of human nature.

In a complementary way, the founding myth of Judeo-Christianity presented mankind as having God-given mastery over all other creatures. For many centuries, mankind belonged to another order of being from that of the dumb beasts. Made in the image of God, men were created with immortal souls, whereas the fishes, birds and beasts were not. To some extent, we can see the higher/lower dualism within man as a microcosm of this macrocosmic dualism between man and the animals.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, these traditional Western dualisms began to be eroded. Partly as a response to that complex set of cultural phenomena we call Romanticism and partly in response to evolutionary theory, the mastery of man and the rational side of his

nature came under increasing questioning. By the end of the nineteenth century, naturalistic, vitalist and pessimistic philosophies began to change advanced western consciousness, so that a major English writer of the early twentieth century could insist that man should be seen as part of "the great living continuum of the universe."

The writer was D. H. Lawrence and he was implicitly challenging the Hellenic and Judeo-Christian heritages that had for centuries dominated the thinking of the West in relation to man and the animals. If we see ourselves as part of a "continuum" we are not far from visualizing man and animals as co-habitants of the earth, in some cases even as competitors for precious life-resources. By the end of the twentieth century, many people have begun to see things in just this way: nature is a finite eco-system which now bears the clear signs of the ravages of man's irresponsible stewardship. Whole species of plants and animals have disappeared or have been endangered under man's arrogant mastery. All life has been put in danger by the creations of his "higher" faculties. The innocent beasts may now seem closer to God than such a creature.

Poetry is often the leading edge of a culture's thinking, and it is not surprising that, as Dr. Chen Hong's research shows, representations of animals in English poetry have led the way in showing the profound changes taking place in Western culture over the past 250 years. It is brilliant research and it tells a story to which we need to pay attention—for the West's excesses have been exported to most of the globe. We need to catch up with poets such as Blake, Lawrence and Hughes and see the animals with new and more intelligent eyes—if we are to understand what is happening to ourselves and our planet in this twenty-first century.

Preface

I have always been fascinated by animals, whether wild or domestic, in real life or in art and literature. My passion for them was enhanced while I was working on my PhD thesis on the topic of animal representations in English poetry. It was also during this time that I came to acquire a broader and more profound view of the significance of animals, both in themselves and in their relations to human beings, in the past and in the present. This is like a huge world opened up to me, and I extend my thanks first of all to my supervisor, Professor David Parker, for handing me the key to this world.

My thanks also go to the other professors in English Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where I did my PhD studies. Their help to me was immense and their concern about my work has never ended, not even after I have left the university. Among them all, I am most grateful to Professor Timothy Weiss, Professor K. K. Tam, and Dr. Peter Crisp. I would also like to thank the Chinese University of Hong Kong for giving me permission to publish my PhD thesis in the present book form.

My thanks, last but not least, is also owed to the School of Foreign Languages, Central China Normal University, for funding the publication of this book. There are few things in this world more beautiful than seeing one's hard work bearing fruit.

It is snowing outside, the first snow of the year coming at its end. I trust it to be a good sign.

Chen Hong
Central China Normal University
December, 2004

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Introduction

Since the mid 1980s, there has been a proliferation of writings on the issue of human-animal relations. The present book can be placed among them as a piece of critical work exploring that issue in English poetry. Many other critics have written on animals in literature, mainly in essays dealing with individual works and occasionally with specific themes in writings of certain periods of time. As far as my research goes, there are only a few books devoted wholly or primarily to the critical study of representations of animals in English literature. The main ones are: *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, & Lawrence* by Margot Norris, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* by Christine Kenyon-Jones and *Aspects of Metamorphosis: Fictional Representations of the Becoming Human* by D. B. D. Asker. Kenyon-Jones's book is mainly concerned with "animals as objects in human culture," or in other words, with the ways animals are seen by Romantic writers to be involved in various aspects of human lives (Kenyon-Jones 1). Asker looks particularly at human-animal fictional metamorphosis as a type of human thinking in an attempt to bridge the gap between the human and the non-human worlds. Both books differ from this book in the objects of study. Whereas wild animals as both real and symbolic are the focus of my attention, it is domestic animals that interest Kenyon-Jones the most, and imaginary

animals more often than real ones that Asker chooses to examine, though the latter's broad-sense definition of "metamorphosis" also includes the kind of psychological identification between a human being and an animal, an issue that is partly my focus as well. Besides, there is difference in approach, as my book takes a historical perspective and the other two are theme-based.

In its attempt to trace the historical development of human perceptions of animals, my book is, to some extent, similar to Norris's in approach. In fact, we both have in view a certain tradition running through a number of generations of Western intellectuals. There is even some overlapping between what is called by Norris the "biocentric tradition" and the Romantic tradition that I am following in my book. I agree very much with Norris's observation of the trend of anti-anthropocentrism in his group of writers that include Nietzsche and Lawrence, and what he says about their unorthodox views of the relationship between nature and culture, and animal/beast and man. But Norris seems to have overlooked the link between the thought of Nietzsche and Lawrence and that of the foremost English Romantic poet William Blake, by deliberately making an effort to distinguish biocentric thought from Romanticism.¹ My argument is that Blake's Romanticism is very different from Wordsworth's and that of most of the other major Romantic poets, especially where their moral attitudes towards irrational nature are concerned. Had Norris seen the biocentric manifestation of Romantic irrationality in the vitalistic imagery of Blake's tiger, she would not have treated him so slightly, nor would she have found the Byronic hero "a genuine problem" to her mapping of the biocentric tradition excluding the Romantic poets.

In my book, I trace the origin of the Romantic tradition, which is in fact a Romantic morality towards wild power, in Blake. Blake is seen as the first English poet, apart from Shakespeare, who has ever attached great importance to the power and energy of wild nature, especially that within human beings, the source of passion and emotion as against reason, the impulsive desire for individual fulfillment rather than social recognition. It is a wild power condemned by traditional Judeo-Christian morality, or accepted with much fascination but also reluctance by, say, Shakespeare, or softened and deprived of much of its danger so as to be contained within human rationality, as in the case of Wordsworth. It is this power that is uplifted by Blake to a position equal to that of the once supremely important Reason or even higher.

Blake's anti-rationalism is passed on to Lawrence and Hughes. Though critics have often commented on the resemblances of the three poets, and some, such as Rand Brandes and Alan Heuser, have discussed in their essays the connections between the two later poets, there seems to be only one, the fictional poetess Elizabeth Costello in J. M. Coetzee's novel *The Lives of Animals*, who puts all the three on the same line and observes their similarities explicitly from the ways they represent animals in their poetry. Costello's remark, that the three poets belong to the same group of writers who "celebrate the primitive and repudiate the Western bias toward abstract thought," is sweeping and yet to the point (52). My book will explore this anti-rationalist attitude shared by the three poets in much greater detail as well as greater depth. It is actually the first book-length study of the relations between these poets, of both their similarities and differences.

But there is more in this tradition running from Blake to Lawrence and Hughes than a celebration of the irrational powers of wild nature. The central part of the book on Lawrence and Hughes looks closely at the poets' complicated ideas about the relationship between bestiality, animality, and humanity as expressed mainly in their animal poems. The three words in the title of the book refer to qualities of human beings. Whereas "bestiality" is a name given to human violence and evil, "animality" refers to essential qualities of animals shared by human beings, such as spontaneity and vitality. "Humanity" may as usual refer to human qualities that are different from those of animals, or sometimes to the desired state of a complete human nature or human existence. A historical examination of the idea of the "wild beast within" reveals the long-standing association between bestiality and wild and predatory animals in nature in the Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian traditions. The lack of clear distinctions between bestial nature and animal nature is still common in contemporary writings about philosophical and literary animals, as one may see, for example, in the aforementioned book by Norris. As Mary Midgley memorably points out, no animals in nature are evil and the so-called "beast within" is "a scapegoat of human wickedness" (101). Inspired by Midgley's philosophical speculations about the problem of the inner beast, I attempt in this book a deeper exploration into the treatment of the beast-animal relationship in the animal poems by Lawrence and Hughes. It is argued with special emphasis that both poets see the distinction between animals and beasts as that between naturally regulated power and the unchecked evil of human corruption, and both stress the importance of the animal as a symbol of instinctive and creative energy within human nature

without, however, losing sight of the uniqueness and irreplaceability of basic human qualities. My central argument draws attention to this much neglected and yet highly important aspect in the two poets' thought regarding human-animal relations. And, as the argument is also applicable to Blake in some essential ways, this theme can be seen as an equally significant aspect of the Romantic tradition.

The emphasis on tradition in this book is not meant as a suggestion that there is an explicit influence of the earlier poet(s) or a conscious learning on the part of the later poet(s) as that in a mentor-disciple relation. The continuity of certain important aspects in the thought and art of the three poets that the book explores seems rather to be a result of the pervasive influence of culture at large; and one of the important tasks of this book is to show how a similar attitude towards life and art like that in these three particular poets has grown out of this culture. It is for this reason that the book, as its subtitle suggests, looks into the historical and cultural contexts within which Lawrence and Hughes wrote their animal poems. The purpose of doing this is to show changes and development in human relations with and ideas about wild nature over different historical periods as well as in various aspects, or in other words, to show what makes it possible for the two poets to think and write about animals in the ways they actually do in their poems.

The book is therefore divided into four chapters, each concentrating on animal poetry from one particular historical period, covering a time of over two hundred years from the pre-Romantic period in the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century after World War II. The Romantic tradition that we have

just outlined makes up the central thread in my historical review of English animal poetry since Blake. Besides its frank attitude towards problems posed to human rationality by wild nature, the tradition is also marked by a non-sentimental view of human-animal relations, especially the courage to face the reality of human violence towards animals as well as towards each other. There is, however, another and much older tradition, the strand of (sometimes sentimental) anthropocentrism, in English poetry that runs counter to the Blakeian anti-sentimental tradition and continues through to the late twentieth century. Hughes's comment about how humans safeguard their own way of life by finding animals violent suggests a deep-rooted human tendency to side with domestic animals and victims of predatory animals as a way of not facing their own systematic predacity towards animals.² If Hughes is right, this is a tendency we see in almost all pre-Romantic poets, and in some of the Romantic, Victorian, Georgian and even post-Second World War poets. It is against this strand of thought, or state of mind, that the poets in our Romantic tradition have put up a challenge.

But there is still another tradition, the Darwinian biocentric tradition, that joins in later to give a further push to the anti-anthropocentric vision already possessed by Blake. The first chapter of the book shows how the eighteenth-century anthropocentric tradition and Wordsworthian Romanticism agree in seeing nature as ultimately harmless and harmonious. Blake's predatory animal intrudes into this harmonious picture of nature by revealing its other, dark side. In this and in his insistence on the innocence of wild predators, Blake could possibly be said to be anticipating some elements of Darwinism. When we come to the

second chapter on the Victorian period, we see that most Victorians try to deal with the implications of Darwinian theory but retreat finally to anthropocentrism. The revival of the notion of harmonious nature in some Georgian poets and the gentility principle in post-war years are symptoms of the incomplete assimilation of the Darwinian scheme. As we shall see in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, both Lawrence and Hughes are profoundly influenced by Darwin and both deal openly and more and more completely with his ideas. While the two poets put emphasis on different aspects of Darwinian nature, they both accept the primacy of nature and the inevitability of survival struggles that give legitimacy to predators as well as their prey. It is here that the biocentric tradition of Darwin meets and interacts with Blakeian romanticism.

Of the four chapters, the first two on animal poetry of the Romantic and Victorian periods provide an introduction to the main body of the book; the discussion of the animal poems by Lawrence and Hughes in two individual and substantial chapters. In selecting poems from among the big collections of animal poetry by the two poets, the book concerns itself mostly with those representing wild animals, especially predators, and those about the encounters between man and animals. It is hoped that a profound understanding of the poets' unorthodox ideas about human-animal relationships will be achieved in reading these poems where nature in its moments of pure instinct and power is in full display and is often set against the sterile force of human civilization. Predatory animals also come into special use to bring out the beast-animal distinction in the central argument of the whole book.

Both poets are seen by some of the critics to be basically

expressing their ideas about human beings or human nature in writing about animals, which is also the case with Blake and almost all of the English poets who have ever written about animals. While the human concern of animal poetry is accepted, it is also argued that our view of the animal within can hardly be separated from that of the animal without, as the former is always influenced by the latter, however indirect that influence may sometimes be. It is for this reason that the book pays attention to both realistic and symbolic animals in reading and interpreting the animal imagery in poetry.

In fact, the realistic dimension in my view of the literary animal is what makes my book different from the work of other literary critics using mainstream, late twentieth-century approaches that would see human-animal relations as notations of class, race, gender or postcolonial politics. Their approaches can be valid or illuminating, but they run the risk of returning ultimate interest to the human world, and in this sense may be subtly complicit with what I have been calling anthropocentrism.³ To this extent, my approach shares something with recent "ecocriticism" in that it is partly driven by a concern for real animals with whom we share the planet and especially wild animals that have often in human history been kept beyond the pale of "civilized" sympathy.⁴ There is in this approach an inherent value placed on the biocentric implications of Darwinism that both Lawrence and Hughes have taken and is therefore appropriate as one way of reading their animal poems. Like Lawrence Buell, I am concerned to avoid a tendency to view all representations in terms of postmodern textuality, a move that may de-emphasize mimesis and the engagements of writers with our real biological environment.⁵ This is also the advice put forward by

Jonathan Bate in *Romantic Ecology* and *The Song of the Earth*, where he keeps stressing the urgent need for literary critics and common readers to recognize nature as nature itself rather than culture in disguise. From this point of view, it is therefore important for me to put claims of realism on animal poetry, to recognize the poets' attention to the physical world of animals. In fact, the three major poets in my study, Blake, Lawrence, and Hughes, can all be seen in some way to have "biocentric" or "ecocentric" thought in their understanding of nature and culture relations. On the other hand, my concern is also with the wild animal within, and to this extent my approach may be described as "ethical" in the sense that I am interested in the broad ethical question, as it was raised by the ancient Greeks, of how a human being should live. It is this interplay of the "ecocritical" and "ethical" strains of my argument that will bring out the poetic animal on two different levels: realistic and symbolic.

But there is still another animal on a different level. When doing stylistic analysis of the poems by Lawrence and Hughes, it is realized that while the poems represent the animals as both real and symbolic, they also resemble, with their peculiar rhythms, the movements of animals—word animals, so to speak. This is more the case with Lawrence than with Hughes, and is why I am personally more interested in Lawrence's animal poetry and devote a considerably larger space to it. But I am not trying to suggest that Hughes's animal poems, especially his early ones, and Blake's too, are inferior in artistic quality to the best of Lawrence's, though it is noticed that their languages appear less spontaneous. The spontaneity of language is not the criterion I am using here to evaluate animal poetry. Rather, it is the poets' attitudes, whether