

MOMENTS OF CONTACT: EPIPHANY AND ESTRANGEMENT IN ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ANIMAL

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Abstract: People are always fascinated by animals' appearance and behavior, but animals' simplicity is often ignored by humans. Two poems *A Blessing* by James Wright and *Come into Animal Presence* by Denise Levertov focus on expressing the greatness of animals. More importantly, they explore the connection and the relationship between humans and animals. However, the perspectives of the two authors on the bond between humans and animals are very different: Wright believes that humans can build up a mutually accepting relationship between humans and nature, while Levertov suggests that humans can never be as pure as animals in nature, and they are unable to blend into nature. While both texts acknowledge the greatness of animals, they diverge sharply in their portrayal of the potential for connection between species. James Wright, in *A Blessing*, presents an optimistic and almost transcendent vision of human-animal intimacy. Through a chance encounter with Indian ponies, the speaker experiences a moment of mutual recognition and emotional unity, suggesting that humans are capable of crossing the existential divide between themselves and nature. The poem culminates in a transformative epiphany where the speaker feels so connected to the natural world that he transcends his own body—symbolically “break[ing] into blossom.” This imagery reinforces Wright's belief in the possibility of a harmonious and mutually accepting relationship.

In contrast, Denise Levertov's *Come into Animal Presence* offers a more skeptical perspective. Levertov emphasizes the moral and instinctual purity of animals, which highlights humanity's alienation from nature. She critiques human complexity and rationality, which she implies corrupt natural innocence and prevent genuine integration into the animal world. To Levertov, animals embody an unmediated way of being that humans, bound by self-awareness and societal constructs, can never attain. Thus, while Wright sees the potential for unity through emotional openness, Levertov suggests a permanent divide, arguing that humans cannot reclaim the simplicity and authenticity that defines animal existence.

In summary, these two poems provide nuanced yet contrasting views on the human-animal relationship—one affirming the possibility of communion and transcendence, the other underscoring alienation and irreducible difference.

Keywords: Human-animal relationship; Nature and humanity; Denise Levertov; Environmental literature

1 INTRODUCTION

A Blessing offers a poignant narrative of an encounter between humans and Indian ponies, illustrating that a profound and viable bond can exist across species. The poem vividly depicts the moment when one of the ponies, embodying both curiosity and trust, approaches the human visitor. Wright captures this intimacy with the lines: “For she has walked over to me, / And nuzzled my left hand.” This physical interaction—gentle, voluntary, and affectionate—serves as a powerful symbol of cross-species connection. It suggests that animals are not merely passive beings but are capable of initiating and engaging in relationships with humans [1].

The emotional resonance of this moment is profound. The pony's nuzzle is not merely an instinctual gesture but an expression of willingness to communicate and connect. The persona's receptive and appreciative response underscores a mutual recognition and respect. This scene reinforces the idea that humans and animals can achieve a harmonious coexistence through empathy and attentiveness. Wright's portrayal is optimistic, implying that such moments of unity are accessible if humans approach nature with openness and humility. The poem ultimately suggests that these connections are not only possible but transformative, offering a glimpse into a more integrated and spiritually fulfilling relationship with the natural world.

2 HARMONY AND CONNECTION IN JAMES WRIGHT'S A BLESSING

Moreover, the poet believes that this interaction benefits the persona by establishing a spiritual connection with animals. The persona understands that the interaction and the bond with a horse are impactful to the result of the human-animal relationship [2]. “That if I stepped out of my body I would break Into blossom.”, this imaginary scene suggests that the persona has transformed successfully and built up a connection with nature. It symbolized the possibilities of human potential to put away the limitations of human's body, and “break into blossom” emphasizes that humans become authentic and flourished beyond the secular physicality. The author believes that humans can achieve the state of human-animal harmony if they make the effort.

This transformative moment is not merely an emotional response but a metaphysical awakening, suggesting that true understanding between species transcends physical presence and touches the realm of the spiritual [3]. The act of “stepping out” of one's body implies a liberation from the constraints of human consciousness and ego, allowing for a

purser, more intuitive mode of being—one that aligns closely with the unmediated existence of animals. The imagery of blossoming further reinforces this idea, evoking notions of growth, renewal, and natural beauty achieved through empathy and attentiveness [4]. In Wright's vision, such connections are not fleeting illusions but attainable realities that require humility, presence, and a willingness to engage with the non-human world on its own terms. The poem thus serves as an invitation to recognize that harmony with nature is not a lost ideal but a continuous possibility, available to those who seek it with an open heart and mindful spirit.

3 ALIENATION AND CRITIQUE IN DENISE LEVERTOV'S "COME INTO ANIMAL PRESENCE"

In contrast, *Come into Animal Presence* focuses on instinctual actions of each animal and its virtuous quality, in strong contrast with humans. Levertov is harshly critical of human motives. For example, Levertov wrote that "No man is so guileless as the serpent." The author describes snakes as honest and indicates that man is even more dishonest than snakes. In many cultures, the snake is always a symbol representing dishonesty and betrayal in various fables, but now the author suggests that snakes are guileless, which is opposite to people's stereotype [5]. The author suggests that human beings can never be as pure and simple as animals, because the human world is too rational. Therefore, the author believes that it is impossible for humans to achieve unity with nature.

This fundamental incompatibility arises from humanity's entanglement in complex social constructs, self-awareness, and moral ambiguities—qualities absent in animal existence. Animals, in Levertov's portrayal, act without pretense or hidden agenda; their actions are direct expressions of instinct and being. The serpent's perceived "guilelessness" is not naivety but a form of existential integrity, untouched by deceit or deliberation. Levertov implies that human rationality, often celebrated as a mark of superiority, actually functions as a barrier to authentic connection with the natural world [6]. Unlike Wright's vision of transcendent unity, Levertov's perspective is decidedly ecological and ethical in its critique: she does not foresee a merging of human and animal consciousness but instead calls for a respectful acknowledgment of difference. Her work urges readers to recognize the moral and spiritual autonomy of animals, not as beings inferior to humans, but as creatures possessing a purity that humans can observe, admire, but never fully reclaim. Thus, the poem serves not as an invitation to union, but as a plea for humility and ethical regard in the face of a world we have long misunderstood and dominated.

4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: TWO VISIONS OF HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS

Furthermore, the author highlights animal's instinctual actions that these creatures are less conscious in a pure and natural way. Animals are simple and innocent with their instinct, but humans are logic and thoughtful. "The llama intricately folding its hind legs to be seated, not disdains but mildly disregards human approval.", the free and unstrained actions of llama in front of humans is a demonstration of animal's thinking: Llama doesn't care about human's opinions or idea [7]. They are just following their instinct without any hesitation and thinking. They might not think about the human approval, and the llama just simply folded its legs. This mindset of animals is the key idea of the poem—humans can never be simple as animals. Humans' every action and speech is constricted by various laws and other's opinions because of their ideological system. Human's shift to nature is prevented by their most proud and unique talent that made the difference between humans and animals—logical thinking. This is the biggest obstacle in front of humans to integrate into the animal presence.

Levertov thus draws a clear ontological distinction between animal being and human consciousness. Where animals act in seamless unity with their nature, humans are fractured by self-reflection, social expectation, and symbolic negotiation. The llama's gesture is not performed for an audience; it is an expression of pure presence, devoid of irony, performance, or hidden intention. In contrast, human behavior is almost always mediated—filtered through layers of meaning, judgment, and intention. This mediation, Levertov suggests, alienates us from the immediacy and integrity that defines animal life. Where Wright envisions transcendence through empathy, Levertov posits that humans must first confront and acknowledge this existential gap. Her poem does not advocate for a return to instinct—a impossibility for rational beings—but rather calls for a deeper ethical recognition of all that we have lost in becoming human [8]. The obstacle is not merely rationality itself, but the hubris that often accompanies it: the belief that we can fully comprehend, control, or even merge with a nature that operates by a fundamentally different logic. True integration, Levertov implies, may begin not in union, but in respectful coexistence—an acknowledgment of difference without the desire to assimilate or dominate.

5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *A Blessing* by James Wright and *Come into Animal Presence* by Denise Levertov both explore the relationship between humans and animals, though their perspectives diverge significantly in tone and philosophical implication. Wright's poem conveys a profoundly optimistic vision, one in which emotional and spiritual connection across species is not only possible but transformative. Through the tender interaction between the human speaker and the Indian pony—symbolized by gestures such as nuzzling—Wright suggests that a mutually accepting relationship with nature is attainable. The poem's closing image, in which the speaker feels he might "break into blossom," serves as a powerful metaphor for transcendence through empathy, implying that humans are capable of overcoming their isolation and achieving genuine unity with the natural world.

In contrast, Levertov's poem presents a more critical and sobering view. She emphasizes the moral and instinctual purity of animals, contrasting it with the complexity and hypocrisy of human behavior. By reversing traditional symbols—such as portraying the serpent as “guileless”—Levertov challenges anthropocentric assumptions and suggests that human rationality and self-awareness often act as barriers to authentic existence within nature. Rather than envisioning harmony, she highlights a fundamental incompatibility: humans, constrained by social norms and cognitive complexities, cannot reclaim the instinctual simplicity that defines animal being.

Thus, while both poets engage deeply with the theme of human-animal relations, their approaches reflect broader ideological tensions within environmental literature. Wright's work leans toward romantic unification, whereas Levertov's leans toward ethical critique and existential acknowledgment of difference. Together, they enrich the literary conversation about ecology, empathy, and the possibility of cross-species understanding.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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