
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Interweaving of Humanity and Animality-Animal Narrative at *Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry*

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ABSTRACT

Alan Dugan was a contemporary American poet. His last volume, entitled *Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry*, was published in 2001 and won Dugan a second National Book Award. This paper is based on Alan Dugan's narration of animals in his new poems and Dugan's narration of animals, which conveys his profound thinking and care about human beings and the life form of existence. "Human beings" are often closely related to animals. The animal narration in Dugan's literary works expresses a hidden human world "behind his back." Therefore, "animals" is one of the keys to interpreting Dugan's complex, mysterious, and bizarre narrative world. The expression and writing of animals can be used as a breakthrough point of Dugan's research so as to dig deeply into his spiritual world and artistic characteristics in order to achieve a new understanding and thinking of his literary creation.

KEYWORDS

Animal narrative; Alan Dugan; *Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry*.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 August 2024

PUBLISHED: 27 August 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijts.2024.4.2.11

1. Introduction

Alan Dugan (February 12, 1923 – September 3, 2003) was an American poet. His first volume, *Poems*, published in 1961, was chosen by the Yale Series of Younger Poets and went on to win the National Book Award for Poetry and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. His last volume, entitled *Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry*, was published in 2001 by Seven Stories Press in New York City and won Dugan a second National Book Award.

Dugan grew up in Jamaica, Queens, and served in World War II, experiences which entered his poetry, though he was not a confessional poet. He lived in Truro, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, where he was a member of the Writing Committee of the Fine Arts Work Center. Dugan's work was published in successive numbered collections under the simple title *Poems*. Alan Dugan was married to the artist Judith Shahn, to whom he dedicated each of his books. He died on September 3, 2003, of pneumonia at age 80.

Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry, the winner of the National Book Award, presents the life work of a giant of American letters, tracks a forty-year career of honest, tough artistry, and 1 shows a man at nearly 80 years of age and still at the height of his poetic power. Dugan's new poems continue his career-long concerns with renewed vigor: the poet's insistence that art is a grounded practice threatened by pretension, the wry wit, the jibes at the academic and sententious, and the arresting observations on the quotidian battles of life. All the while, he peppers his poems with humorous images of the grim and daunting topics of existential emptiness.

Animal narrative refers to a creative type in which animals, as self-independent life subjects, participate in the construction of novels and assume the function of action elements. Animal personification is the greatest feature of animal narrative novels in the new era. In the animal narrative novels of the new era, animals have their own story development lines, which can be single or group images with the same function, and participate in expressing the understanding of nature and human society in the text. The animal narrative should first take animals as the relevant subject matter, and the text narrative must be related to animals. "Animal narrative" is, of course, a literary narrative about animals, which goes without saying. Specifically, the position of animals in the text narrative is not strictly limited. It can be the center of the whole narrative and expression, or it can only involve the relevant animal description, but the relevant description must be related to the theme of the work. That is, the animal image in the text must reflect its own specific meaning and due validity space linked to the theme of the work so that it can reflect some special kind of narrative in symbolism, metaphor, realism, and other important functions that can occupy a relatively important space in the whole narrative.

People have human nature, and things have their own natures. Each of them respects its own essence and abides by its own way. But since ancient times, there are countless ties between people and animals. Man is evolved from animals. Sartre thinks that man is a social animal in *Portrait*, his 70, while Cassirer (2021) says that man is a symbolic animal in *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. Whether we define human attributes by "sociality" or explore human essence by "symbolization," there is no doubt about human "animality." And with the passage of time, many cultural concepts and spiritual characteristics of human society have been embodied in animals, and animals have even become cultural symbols with specific significance for human beings. Therefore, to explore the relationship between human beings and animals and to interpret the writer's writing about animals in his literary works is not only the understanding and thinking of human beings as the subject of social existence on other forms of life existence; To some extent, this is also a way for writers to break through the historical fog and explore and recall the essence of human life. Therefore, the study of the animal narrative in the writer's works involves the exploration of the relationship between man and man, man and nature, man and society.

2. Literary Review

Dugan's writing style is the focus of the academic community. Gallagher (2002) comments in *Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry*, which documents a formal and sardonic eye that sees truth. According to him, Dugan's poems provide readers with his classical irony, not the flippancy of a lot of hipper, younger verse. To be savored, slowly and carefully, even in some of the unevenness of Dugan's later work. Except for academic papers, several book reviews also highly-praised about this collection of poems. Alan Dugan's poetry is wonderfully crisp. He writes poetry with the seriousness it deserves while also displaying a comical side. His depth of intelligence is matched by no other living poet. Buy this volume and be amazed. If you aren't amazed, then you should try reading it again (Lynch, 2001:97). After Scharf & Zaleski (2001) having read this book in its entirety, they still laugh at how Alan Dugan can find a perfect marriage in the truthful and the crude, as well as the direct and the sublime. How does such an erudite man resort to using such language? It's a wrongheaded question. They Take delight in how Dugan crosses from the depths of contemplation to outrageously hilarious yet profound conclusions.

Domestically, due to the large volume of Dugan's poetry collection and the lack of translated versions, few domestic scholars have conducted research on Dugan's poetry collection.

In a word, foreign scholars mainly focus on the creative language of Dugan's poetry collection, especially his freedom and randomness. His work is easily recognized, dense, and irreverent. He has maintained a style throughout the years that is unmistakable.

3. The Origin of Animal Narration in Dugan's poems

The influence of regional culture on a poet's literary creation, way of thinking, aesthetic taste, talent, and temperament is hard to ignore. It is just the so-called "one side of the land and water nourishes one side of the people" (Thompson, 2010: 398). Taylor, a French scholar, once put forward the three elements theory of "race, environment, and era" that affected the development of culture and art. He believed that the creation of literary works had an inseparable relationship with the spirit of the times and the impact of the regional environment. Many contemporary critics have also said that the geographical environment of their hometown has an important impact on a writer's literary growth. The image of cats in the Western world: cats in the west are called the familiar friends of witches and witches, which is due to the superstition in the Middle Ages that Satan devil likes to be a black cat, and witches often take this cat as an acquaintance. In ancient Rome, the cat was a symbol of freedom (Payne, 2010: 117). The

Statue of Liberty was often depicted as a cat at her feet. The reason why cats are used to symbolize freedom is that cats love freedom, and no animal is as strongly opposed to regulation as cats. In Dugan's new poems, there were two poems about cats. The first one was *Another Cat Poem: A Cat Is Not A Dancer But A Hunter*, and the other one is *Another Cat Poem. To A Cat Person*.

Dugan's animals are either all animals, or have human nature, or have both human nature and animal nature, so they can be divided into the following three categories: first, they are natural animals, which are real normal animals in life, and they have the attributes and character of animals; The second is to alienate animals (Spencer, 2010: 471-472). Animals are alienated into human shapes for various external reasons, which makes animals in life have human moods. Alienated animals are like animals and people. They have both animal attributes and human feelings and thoughts, highlighting the human nature of animals.

They are magic writing with human and animal interwoven, emphasizing Dugan's "animal nature" of human. Although human appearance, it highlights the attributes of some animals, emphasizing the expression of human's animal nature (Malamud, 2016: 17). In poetry, whether it is directly writing about animals, or using animals to metaphor people, or using a series of animals to write about human beings, what reveals behind it is not only Dugan's animistic way of thinking, but also his understanding and thinking about society, human nature, and life, which lies behind the animal narrative.

In these poems, Dugan does not choose the narrative person of animals but creates the poem from the narrative perspective of the third person, which brings people a sense of detachment. Such a narrative perspective does not create a sense of sober engagement, which avoids overindulgence in animal perception.

4. Depictions of Animals in Dugan's Poems

In these poems which are related to animals, Dugan does not choose the narrative person of animals, but creates the poem from the narrative perspective of the third person, which brings people a sense of detachment. Such a narrative perspective does not create a sense of sober engagement, which avoids overindulgence in animal perception.

Such animal writing is placed in the midst of many social problems, and the writing of animals in the poem is used to reveal or reflect the social status quo. Like to the cat in *To A Cat Person*,

*I had always wanted to see the relation
of blood and roses restated in some novel way,
without the biological unconsciousness of thorns,
and here it was, established by the cat's
biological violence; I saw the color
of love and death exhibited red
in conscious and unselfconscious ways
in the mouse's blood beneath the roses.*

The author treats the phenomenon of cat-catching mice from a curious Angle. In Dugan's opinion, the relationship between cat and mouse is like that between rose and blood, with thorns on the rose enough to puncture the skin and bleed blood. So roses, like a cat in Poet, are deadly. Because of the cat's biological violence, Dugan also connected the image of love and death at this moment. The rose is a common image of love. And the exposure of blood means death. In this scene, conscious or unconscious, the tangible color of love and death jumps out vividly and consciously, and that is red. The reflection of the same light, red, actually means two very different things at this moment. The red rose that brings love and hope, and the drained blood that brings death. Ironically, the blood of the mouse that the cat had killed was now trickling under the bright red roses. The two red positions also indicate the tragic death of the mouth.

In the poem *Address to a Bird on a Visit Home*,

*"This is your brother the bird."
My mother made a kissing sound;
my dead father's voice spoke
from the old budgerigar's throat:*

*"Give us a kiss; that's a good boy,"
through the static of his bird's wit.
Old brother bachelor, you are
too old and tame to fly away
to love, singing in the cold outside,
so, imitate the hissing radiator
through your steam-heat age
and be my mother's husband
as I refused to be
and somehow got away.*

Due to the damage of the war, Dugan's view of the world and society becomes unusual. The identity of the parrot is originally as a member of the family, in an animal - and bird-loving family, the bird is treated as its own family member. And the replacement for this family member is very special. The parrot was originally supposed to be Dugan's "big brother" in the family chain, but because of the parrot's ability to talk, which coincidentally happens to be the same voice as Dugan's father, Dugan joked that the parrot wanted to be his mother's husband, which was the original position of Dugan's father. Here, we can see that Dugan's animals are out of their natural state.

With the development of the social economy and the advancement of modern civilization, the severe social reality of the ecological crisis caused by the modernization process has aroused widespread concern and thought. People have improved their living standards and achieved better material benefits but gradually lost their poetic homes. In recent years, the ecological protection movement is booming, and the development of ecological literature is also been increasingly prosperous. More and more writers resort to writing, holding high the banner of animal protection, and care about the harmonious development of man and nature. There is a community of cats and birds in Dugan's works. In Another cat poem, Dugan depicts the scene of a cat catching a bird as two dancers confronting each other. Dancing is not the real writing of the cat's intention. The real purpose of a cat is to hunt the bird. In the animal world, things compete for natural selection, and the fittest survive. When the author wrote this poem, he looked at this phenomenon as a human bystander, but what does it imply? In life, there are hunters playing harmless dancers everywhere. Just like life, it seems that human beings are confronted with it, but in fact, the two are incomparable. It seems that they have the right to talk about life, but the outcome is already doomed. How can a weak bird defeat a cat that is many times bigger than itself? What's more, a cat is good at disguise and cunning.

The poet's life experience is the direct source of animal narrative works. First, the memory of World War II has been the subject of many writers. World War II meant a period of life that was different not only in the sense of politics and culture but also in the way it was lived, which changed the experience of some writers. Regardless of whether the writers themselves come from the countryside or previously lived in the city, the rural life experience in the special era has given them certain wealth and opened up a new possibility for the creation of their works. In addition, the creation intention of the obscure expression of the political atmosphere of serious and the emotional dependence of people on animals in the war, thus there are such works in the writing of World War II: They also show the "scars" of the Second World War and the "reflection" on the Second World War. However, they not only narrate a single story from the perspective of human beings but introduce the behavior subject of "animals" and increase the observation perspective of animals. By examining the life course of animals and, comparing it with human life and complementing each other, the thematic implication of the works will be more evident. Like in the poem, *A Cat Is Not A Dancer But A Hunter*,

*The cat on its hind legs
taking a swipe at a mocking bird
was in a serious dance
but a stand-off dance
with the bird because
the cat didn't catch
the bird with its claws
and the bird didn't beak
the cat with its beak:
it just amused us,*

*but later, the cat won some
other encounter. The words
"serious" and "dance" did not apply.
It came back to us wing-mouthed,
(the wings of a fledgling
coming out of both sides
of its mouth, the bird
a bloody fluff in its teeth)
expecting our congratulations,
expecting us to say Good hunting,
Dancer, dancer, oh you dancer*

The narrative Angle of the cat here is different from the previous one. In another poem about the cat, Dugan describes the relationship between love and death. In that poem, Dugan juxtaposed the colors red for love and death, a red rose for love, and the flowing blood of a mouse at the end of its life. The accumulation of space and time is a very impressive picture for readers. In this poem, however, the cat has a kind of image of disguise. It is a dancer but more of a hunter. What's unusual is that this cat disguises itself as a dancer to "dance" with the bird. However, it's looking for the perfect moment to deliver a fatal blow to the bird in order to make the perfect transition from dancer to hunter. This is very similar to the game in war. In war, every decision needs to be made more strategically, in seemingly harmless but cooperative moves, not really by mindless people, but by finding the right time to deliver a fatal blow to the enemy. The image of the cat is freedom because the cat comes without shadow and goes without trace, so the poet uses the image of the cat to compare a war, which means to fight for freedom.

As a former soldier, Dugan understands war in a way that no one who has ever been to war can appreciate, and the eagerness of soldiers to win is definitely not the eagerness of the White House. To the soldier who goes to war, winning on the battlefield represents a victory for the nation and a victory for individual freedom. Lose not only the country will lose face, more is their own life regret because they do not know whether they can live.

5. The Theme Connotation of Animal Narration in Dugan's Poems

Compared with the literature works before, the animal narrative is not only more spectacular in number but also have a wider range of materials. Looking back on the development of animal narrative in the new period, we can roughly divide animal narrative novels in the new period into the following four types:

One is the animal narrative under the connotation of scar reflection. World War II is the memory of those who lived through it. After the end of the Second World War, the scar literature showing the physical and mental damage of the Second World War and the reflective literature asking the reasons for the suffering of people in the Second World War appeared one after another. Until now, perhaps there are works with the theme of the Second World War, showing the damage brought by the Second World War and the reflection on it. The appearance of animals in such texts is, on the one hand, due to the consideration of content. The inclusion of animals in the text not only adds a story development line to the text but also can enrich the ideological connotation of the text through the intimate relationship between animals and people, reflecting the violent blindness of mutual torture between people in the war. On the other hand, it is intended to neutralize the critical edge of the text without damaging its criticism through the metaphorical expression of human nature and animal nature so as to express the block of the heart in the situation of the suppression of discourse rights and a strong political atmosphere.

The second is the animal narrative from the ecological perspective. Animal liberation campaigner Peter Singer once said: "We are concerned with preventing pain and misery, against arbitrary discrimination (Nelles, 2001: 191-192). We believe that it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on other animals, even if that animal is not a member of the human race, and we believe that animals are mercilessly and cruelly deprived by humans, and we want to change that." The central expression of the animal narrative is to reveal the cruel persecution of animals by human beings to satisfy their production, development, and appetite, to advocate respect for the survival rights of animals, and to reflect on the relationship between human and nature.

The third is the animal narrative in the vernacular writing. Countryside is the regional reference corresponding to the city. From this perspective, some texts in the animal narrative of scar reflection and the animal narrative from the ecological perspective also belong to this category. Therefore, the types of animal narrative novels are divided mainly from the thematic implication of the works to be expressed. In animal narrative novels in rural writing, animals are domesticated livestock, mostly cattle, dogs, sheep, horses, camels, etc. The suffering of animals and their own life vitality are often used to compare with the images of people in rural life so as to explore the meaning of life and understand the bound life of people. In this kind of text, people's living conditions, mental outlook, and customs are the focus of their expression.

The fourth is the animal narration under the urban situation. Dugan noticed the spiritual oppression brought by modern civilization and urban culture, lost himself in the bizarre urban space, and became an alienated urban stranger. "Modern civilization is not only a revolution in production but also a revolution in perception." In urban life, "new changes in movement, speed, light, and sound have led to confusion in the sense of space and time." In addition, modern civilization has brought about problems in interpersonal relationships, such as the birth of people, the weakness of emotions, and the loss of family and compassion. It also makes people feel the contradictions and conflicts brought about by the advancement of modern civilization. In the fierce social competition, people follow the action principle of "nothing to do with themselves and high business" and turn a blind eye to the difficulties of others. The relationship between people becomes more indifferent. In addition, the advancement of modern civilization has made people indulge in the pursuit of money, fame, wealth, interests, and other desires. People become trapped animals in the cage of desire and have no way out in the desolate spiritual ruins.

Since the market economic system has been continuously improved, the city has been expanding, new opportunities and new challenges together shape people's life; in this social environment, people's living conditions in the city has also attracted the attention of poets. Taking urban life as the background, it is an artistic choice for poets to use the life track of animals to dispel emotions and enhance the expression of emotions. At present, the number of this type of animal narrative poetry is not much but also reflects the writers' exploration and innovation of animal narrative theme, which promotes the growth and development of animal narrative poetry.

The importance is the ambiguity and dissociation of the animal narrative. In recent years, with people's attention to the relationship between man and nature and the rise of the ecological movement, many writers have related animal narrative expression, showing the awe and care for animal life, which is a very firm animal narrative. Compared with other writers of animal narration, the animal narration in Dugan's poetry has a kind of contradiction and ambiguity, showing a certain degree of ambiguity and dissociation. This fuzzy narrative view of animals is expressed in the novel as the fuzzy attitude towards animals: on the one hand, we stand in the position of animals, have humanitarian sympathy and compassion for animals, deconstruct and criticize the hubris of anthropocentrism. On the other hand, on the basis of Darwin's biological evolution, people and animals are placed on the same platform for care, and people must be better than animals to survive.

Dugan wrote from the standpoint of human beings. He was anxious or worried about the future of human beings. He pondered over the fate of human beings and raised his creation to the height of philosophy. Only such writing is valuable. From the starting point of Dugan's literary creation, we can see that he is always concerned about the development of the fate of human society as an intellectual. In his literary creation, we can see the deep metaphors of animal narrative in ecological consciousness, life subject, and modern civilization. In the aspect of ecological consciousness, Dugan used animals to examine the tense and delicate relationship between man and nature and lamented that the past prosperity was gone;

At the level of life subject, Dugan took care of the shortcomings of human nature with animal thinking and expressed deep sorrow and regret for the "degradation of species" of human vitality. At the level of modern civilization, the theme connotation contained in Dugan's animal narrative is to show the despicability, vulgarity, and evil that exist universally in human nature from the perspective of animals, reflect on the social vulgarity, and mercilessly ridicule and criticize the ugliness of secular society.

A great nation should be one that is full of passion for life and dares to publicize the wild spirit. However, people nowadays are becoming more and more impotent, losing their due masculinity. The subject spirit of life seems to be cut off, and the great power and wildness of the ancestors seem to have disappeared. People become cowardly person lacking the spirit of struggle, and the nation becomes a docile and obedient nation.

The hidden worry of species degradation. In the novel, Dugan repeatedly reflected on the spiritual existence of human life subject through the writing of animals, and revealed the plight of human existence, and expressed his concern for the degradation of the human species through the situation of animals. The animal narration in Dugan's poems expresses the theme of "the degeneration of species" of human beings in two ways: one is to metaphor the degeneration of human beings with the degeneration of animals; The second is to compare the vitality of animals with the original strength of human beings. Under the care of life integration thinking, animals and people have the same life existence. Dugan insinuates the degeneration of people by writing about the degeneration of animals in his novels.

The call of wild life. Dugan, when lamenting the loss of human subject vitality and the degradation of species, unswervingly pursued and publicized a wild spirit of life. It is permeated with a kind of primitive artistic atmosphere, and all of this is what is lacking in the era of excessive exaggeration, and of course, it is also what is lacking in the present era of affectation, tenderness, and coolness. This has a great connection with Dugan's view on life. Dugan and his life evolution view of Darwin's "survival of the fittest in natural selection" are highly praised.

In *Another Cat Poem: A Cat Is Not A Dancer But A Hunter*, The shocking situation of the war between the cat and the bird, on the one hand, symbolizes the brutal war and the crazy slaughter of innocent people. On the other hand, the ease with which birds are eaten by cats is also a warning of the decline of human vitality. Dugan's cat, which is full of bird meat, has changed from a cat to a war full of wild power. The human world is the same as the animal world. Only by showing the spirit of the strong can we have a place.

6. Conclusion

Dugan took care of human life and human essence with the life state of animals in nature and tried to find the flourishing life spirit form with a poetic art form. When he found the abstract essence of human life, Dugan tried to use the description of animal representativeness to construct an ideal life form and use the rich and diverse life forms of animals to express the wild and poetic life state of human beings. In Dugan's poetry about animals, we can see not only Dugan's free spirit of revelry like Bacchus, his persistent exploration of complex human nature, his warm praise for the wild and free spirit in life, but also the colorful animal world in his works that makes people forget to return. Dugan was deeply concerned about the development of human destiny. He took equal care of everything in the world under the context of life integration. The animals in the pen are just an angle chosen to reflect on human beings. The animal narrative in Dugan's poetry reflects on the existence of human life subject with animals and thinks about the relationship between people, people and society, and people and nature. Although it shows unique aesthetic implication and literary value, from the perspective of dialectical thinking, Dugan's animal narrative has some obvious limitations, mainly manifested in the ambiguous and dissociative narrative attitude and the repetition and collage of animal narrative plots.

The relationship between animals is also a key to understanding the relationship between humans. Dugan cares about human nature with animals, observes animals with humans, removes the veil of historical fog, pays attention to the development of human destiny, inquires about the ugly and beautiful essence of human nature, explores and contemplates the essence of life, and shows affinity and love for nature. Animal narrative is a perspective used by Dugan to express his reverence for life, encompassing a traditional humanitarian sentiment, a compassionate awareness of life care, and his inner belief in the equality of all things. It is Dugan's respect and reverence for all natural forms of life. Dugan's animal narrative has a unique interpretation of life, society, history, and real life.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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