

Animals

Summary of the Poem Animals

Animals by Walt Whitman

Stanza 1

*I think I could turn and live with animals, they are
so placid and self-contained,
I stand and look at them long and long.*

In this stanza, the poet here desires to turn into an animal and live with them as he is impressed by their calmness and the purity of their mind. Unlike humans, animals seem so contained with their lives and are happy in their natural surroundings. The simple lives of animals help them maintain self-control and their rationality. He stands and looks at them for a long time. In the phrase 'long and long' the implied meaning is the longing that the poet feels for these two qualities in human beings.

Stanza 2

*They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,*

The poet is quite happy with the fact that animals do not make complaints and cry about their conditions like humans. They eat and sleep peacefully as they have nothing to worry about, while humans, because of their wrong actions are unable to do so and thus cannot sleep without worrying about them. Humans, even after committing sins, talk about God and rightness, while animals are simple creatures and they do not need to worry about praying to God. The poet here means that since animals are so pure, they do not pray to God for forgiveness or ask God to fulfil their desires like humans.

Stanza 3

*Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with
the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that
lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.*

In this stanza, the poet says that Animals do not possess material things like humans and they are happy and satisfied without all the worldly items, the desire of which has affected human beings very badly. This desire to own things has been called madness by the poet. Animals are free from the habit of praying to their ancestors. When the poet says 'not one is respectable' he means that since all of them are equal, there is no question of respect to some and insult to others. All these features of animals make them happy and uncomplaining.

Stanza 4

*So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince
them plainly in their possession
I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?*

In this stanza, the poet feels that animals represent human beings in some way. This means that animals seem to have what humans once had, i.e. virtues like kindness, Self-containment and innocence. They symbolise the lost values of the human race. He believed that civilisation has corrupted human beings and instead of teaching values to them, it has taught them greed. He believes in this poem that humans dropped these virtues a long time ago and have forgotten them.

Quick Revision Notes

- In the poem 'Animals', the poet Walt Whitman praises animals for being better than human beings and for possessing all such qualities that humans lack or have forgotten.

- Those qualities are calmness, the lack of greed and the ability to stay happy and contained among others.
- The poet wants to live among animals and experience a life where no one complains and where they are free of sins and sorrow. The most important theme of the poem is not to praise how good animals are, but to compare humans with them in order to highlight the flaws of their nature.
- The poet believes that probably a very long time ago, humans possessed all these qualities mentioned above, but they have now lost them.