

YouHUMAN

Humans have long posed the question,
 What makes us human and distinct?
 Walking on two, using tools with precision?
 Or is it reading and writing not by instinct?

Drawing and sculpting, building structures?
 Thinking in abstract, mathematical notions?
 Poetic writing, composing, singing to rapture?
 Social events, smiling and subtle emotions?

Intellectual feats, they are for certain,
 That only with “higher” centers of brain,
 Through tortuous training and with pain,
 Only humans have mastered, we entertain.

But examples abound of performing tasks,
 By “lower” beings we dub “animals”,
 Distinctly “human” feats and crafts;
 Blunting then the boundaries of normals.

Walking on two legs and using forelimbs,
 These were primal in humans’ progress.
 But walking on two legs is to birds not foreign,
 Other animals do too, oft under duress.

Adept are some animals at using tools honed,
 The pride of place here belongs to ravens.
 Birds that crack nuts by dropping stones,
 And in chimps ‘fishing’ for termites is a given.

Examples exist of primates learning,
 Some were tricks taught on purpose
 Then passing skills to their offspring;
 Some tricks and skills learned passively.

Speaking can be a gesture or growl.
 Birds chirp and sing, use alarm calls;
 Sometimes ‘speaking’ is done with howls.
 Language isn’t human invention at all.

Sounds in very low pitch, which travel far,
 Some that cross oceans, as clicks and grunts;
 Or in very high pitch that we don’t hear,
 Spoken thus is language we don’t understand.

Parrots 'speak' in meaningful lines;
 Sometimes in mimicry but true at times,
 Rudiments of language do they design,
 These, Einsteins of the bird kind.

Many a smart pet, from hogs to hounds,
 And, special talents some elephants tout,
 Tricks they learn do leave us spellbound,
 Like drawing and painting, with brush in snout.

At least one horse was taught to count,
 Tapping with hoof, fame this horse found.
 Answers to questions in proper amount;
 Or did handler slip hints of answers sound?

Smiling and subtle expressions of emotion,
 We humans consider make us "human",
 These are classical arguments and notions,
 Long-held beliefs that are hard to disown.

Well, both chimps and bonobos when tickled,
 Wear expressions that resemble closely,
 As manifestation of happiness and delight,
 Gestures that mimic laughter, though loosely.

Here below I will narrate,
 Many a feature, behavior and attribute,
 That proclaim human's distinct traits.

Only we humans go to great length,
 To make clothes to cloak and cover nudity;
 Such behavior belongs to human bandwidth,
 This awareness and the need for modesty.

Intellectual pursuits remain the domain,
 Reading and writing, constructing poems,
 Proclaiming superiority of human brain,
 Here on earth these only humans can claim.

"Pack animals" congregate and celebrate;
 They hunt and share within their family;
 Festivals and social events that are elaborate,
 Only humans invent solely to make merry.

Cozy homes, citadels, cities and towns,
 Building prowess creatures thus manifest;
 Examples are bee hives, termite mounds,
 And beaver dams, weaver bird's nests.

These fine projects are dictates of instinct.
 But, blueprints in hand, do humans sanction,
 Houses and buildings then people construct,
 Structures by design in shape and function.

Making and using fire, only humans do,
 For own safety, cooking and lighting;
 In homes, offices and public places too,
 Devices to control heating and cooling.

Technology, Ah! Technology,
 That we obsess with no apology.
 From locomotion to communication,
 Only humans are masters of innovation.

But,

Uniquely human are some deeds,
 Destructive acts, sadistic and mean;
 Examples abound and these I concede
 Are behavior that we can only bemoan.

Fishing with hooks, then unhook and discard,
 Skin live animals, kill for fur, tusks and fins,
 Only we relish such acts with wanton disregard,
 No other species are we likely to find.

Pairing for life is common in nature,
 Pairing and breaking up now so common,
 In human societies a frequent feature.
 This is another practice I wish to condemn.

Uniquely a trait of humans is suicide,
 Or extermination in Nazi gas chambers,
 And in killing fields of Cambodia, genocide;
 In these too humans are champions.

Create faiths and deities,
 Then fight wars and "Jihads",
 Invent new ways of killing ability,
 In "Holy" acts of suicide!

Mindless killing of masses in seconds,
Innocent people in theaters, malls or rallies,
By unloading rifles with dozens of rounds,
On killing streets or our very own alleys.

Of all that we humans carry as traits,
Uniquely alarming is this gift for cruelty .