



HERE ARE SOME MEN
WHO AS POETS ARE ANIMALS.

Just as some men, when they couple,
Couple in bestial fashion,
So some poets, when they write poetry,
Give themselves over to the inner beast.
To do so, in a pure sense,
Is a very difficult feat.
But this beast poetry, when someone manages to shape it,
Is a very powerful thing

II.

It is of course very difficult of comprehension.
It is an affair of images, without thought.
It is the blood crying
It is the blood crying down the corridors of the arteries
The blood crying as it turns corners in the veins
The blood crying in a passionate mindlessness.
It is always an alien thing

Wilfred Watson

A MANIFESTO FOR BEAST POETRY

“The expression of the soul of
the dumb ox would have a penetrating
beauty of its own, if it were
uttered with genius — with
bovine genius”

WYNDHAM LEWIS

III.

Don't mistake the failures of the sects of poets
We see in these debased ages
For beast-poetry. Beast-poetry is not puffed up.
It exalts no one. Machinery multiplies
And books, and the dehorsification of dairies
And haulage systems provides a new houyhnhmn
To whinny at every street corner.
But this isn't beast poetry

Beast-poetry isn't the sort of blue-stocking knitting
That Archibald MacLeish or Marianne Moore
Their disciples their imitators and cousins germane
Wage into books.

Beast-poetry has nothing to do with blue guitars.
I expect women, those who love
Below the mind, who live always
In their hearts breasts and bowels
Are best at this sort of poetry.
But — beast-poetry, it would make Gertrude Stein shudder

Beast-poetry never thinks in blue.
It never puts on a blue-thinking stocking.
It never thinks

IV.

In all poetry, everything
Is either in the infinitude or in the limitation.
The be-all of beast-poetry lies in the limitation.
A man playing dog, this is what I mean —
Is not a man excluding
Himself from every level of life except the animal's.
Neither is a man playing dog
Supplying flame to every thorn branch twig or leaf
Of the burning bush which is mankind.
It is very difficult to be a man,
Since the idea of a man
Is, biologically speaking, one of pre-eminence —
Excellence is the first testicle of a man.
A man to be a man must be more than a man playing dog.
A man to be a man must be more than a man.
But to write beast-poetry a man must be no more than a beast

V.

The house is a very large one.
Let us also admit that it is an exceedingly noble one,
Noble, yes, but cracks in the wall, something gone,
An uncanny stink of ghost behind the door,
The smell of human tallow haunts the woodwork, the birth and death smells,
The breast smell and the smell of suckling children,
The smell of love-making and of cooking fat,
The aroma of laundry-business, the fungus-smell of old clothes,
Footleather, bookbindings, newspapers.
We despair of the plumbing, the hand-basins
Invite the auctioneer's hammer, their stain is
Macbeth's, everlastingly water-proof, marked for perdition,
We make the sign of the cross in the dust
Of the mantel-piece marble. We stretch
Out a finger of dust
We shut up the library & reception rooms & the great hall & private chapel &
promenades.
We let the ground go to the statues, the gardens to pot

We eat sandwiches in the kitchen.
In this way, less expense of spirit.
But we don't become — in this way — rats.
It is very difficult to become a rat.
It is difficult enough to be a mouse.
It is, in an opposite and northwest way, still more difficult to become a man

VI.

But beast-poetry is a rare and powerful thing.
We prefer something in between.
In a sense we pay upsidedown homage to Pascal.
We deny, let us say, 'the glory of' with 'the misery of'.

Let's pretend
My god, my god, how bizarre, how very bizarre,
What a sense of humour —
Let's pretend we are mice, squeak, squeak.
But this is pretence. It is not beast-poetry

VII.

The profound the deep
Poetry of the beast doesn't theorize.
It doesn't think at all.
It doesn't think, it is —
It really is. It has no tripe, no stomach for the cerebral
Hypocrisies of Archibald MacLeish *et al.*
It isn't like the visceral poetry of D. H. Lawrence
All bladder bladder bladder
Full of pigheaded opinion.
It has no conceptions whatever of, on, or about anything.
It doesn't take its Hiroshimas from the papers.
A plain matter-of-fact non-mythical anti-mystical Belsen
Is the ordinary keel of its being.
It knows no short-cuts to experience

VIII.

Shallow critics denounce this sort of poetry
They say it is mad
Let us all take hands and go skipping it tripping it back to Wordsworth
Plain living sanity and the simpler humanities
But O Dorothy Dorothy

O Tintern Abbey
Shallower critics praise it for being mad.
The very best critics
Raising their eyes to the white goddess
Observe that it is
Incomprehending with the deep unreason
Of the deep incomprehensible beast,
That is, if it is beast-poetry,
Not a fake

IX.

The very essence
Of being a beast, is to be the remnant of a living soul
That has in obedience to a complex of appetites
Reduced itself to being a machine.
The ant-eater is a machine for eating ants.
The lion is a machine for eating antelopes.
The ant is a machine for eating dead cats, etcetera etcetera.
Nevertheless, there is something ascetic about a beast.
There is even something ascetic about a rabbit —
To become a machine an animal has to give up all but a very nominal sex-life.
A beast can't afford to dally with contraceptives.
There is something profoundly tragic about a beast.
The machinery with which it is invested is ancestral.
This bestial machinery lends a dignity
Which only an ages-old machinery can bestow, every motion a pathos.
Hence, one of the skins of beast-poetry
Is, it is a satire
On human depravity

X.

Don't imagine that a course
In the archetypes of Dr. Jung will provide
Any pass-key to the deep bestiality of the beast.
Quite the contrary.
Dr. Jung takes a mop and bucket of water
And plenty of good old-fashioned eighteenth-century yellow floor soap
The sunlight soap of the enlightenment
To every cluttered up cupboard of the human soul,
He's tried to clean up every bestial corner,
To mop up every untidy stain of nature.

Beast-poetry
Skulks off to some Canada of the unconscious the Herr Doktor misses.
The holy simplicity of psychology
Never comes anywhere near beast-poetry

XI.

The great masters of beast-poetry are, as follows,
Simply none. Beast-poetry is still unwritten.
There is lacking the great renunciation.
This age ought to have written great beast-poetry
For we are the first great age of the machine
But we still pervert the machine to human uses
Instead of, with pure animality, surrendering the human being to the machine.
The machine subsists as a tool, merely.
Affirmation, affirmation & pride, have crept in

Mr. T. S. Eliot with his wonderful beast's nose for images
Might have done it.
When he said
That, had he meant something else, he'd have said something else
He came very close to beast-poetry.
But he wasn't beast enough to write beast-poetry.
He is not even a minor beast-poet.

No, Mr. Eliot is not the John the Baptist of beast-poetry.
He thinks too much, until his images think too.
Eventually
The strict critic of beast-poetry
Catches Mr. Eliot out — his beast-images
Are screens for thought.
He lacked the deep humility of the beast

XII.

Whether a man dances
Or whether a man makes music
Or whether he gestures or paints a picture or carves sculptures
(Or simply is)
Words keep recurring. It isn't
Sufficient merely to dance, this won't do for a man.
He must dance a madrigal.
He must caper to the words of a ballad.
Or if he makes water —

A MANIFESTO FOR BEAST - POETRY

But all this verbal antic, the desperate endeavour to speak
Is quite foreign to beast-poetry.
Let us understand this, that beast-poetry uses words in a totally new way,
It uses words as experiences. It excludes speech.
Beast-poetry is profoundly uneloquent.
Words are used so as to be, not to speak

There is something appallingly mute
About beast-poetry. It is as silent, as uncommunicative
As a mountain. You do not listen
To, or read, or perform exegesis upon
Or write scholarly articles against, the poetry of the beast.
It brutally scorns the academic handmaidens.
You descend mindlessly and alone into its caverns.
Beast-poetry is the most dumbing
Of all human acts

XIII.

I wouldn't openly pretend that we in Canada
Have in our public forests, game-preserves or animal-parks
Bred any great beast-poet.
But in my secret heart
I pretend to myself alone that the great beast-poet
Will cleave from our substance. We have pioneered
The animal-natures, the brutal uneloquences,
The massive contempt for the civilizing influences;
And machines to fit the necessary degradations.
We have the CBC.
It is excusable in a Canadian to believe that the great beast-poetry
Slouches towards Toronto to be born

XIV.

Therefore I call out aloud to the future
I summon the age about to be
Not to debase itself in any petty way to the sub-human,
But to cut itself off boldly from all its ancestors;
To descend impudently down to the shameless depths
Of beast-poetry. I am weary
Of this shabby-parrot, this figurative lingerie,
And of the free & easy verse opinions.
I await the terrible new beast-poetry