



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