

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HEAD:
a book of poems with an introduction

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by

Robert Joseph Lewis

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

McGill University
Department of English
May, 1977

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ABSTRACT

This is a thesis of vitalist poetry. The poems are divided into five sequences: each sequence explores one of the various phases of the vitalist quest. The desperation of the quest is shown to be in direct proportion to modern, technologically orientated life-styles. The quest is a quest for roots; vital roots, which are found in organic rather than technological environments. The quest is often realized by a regression to primitive life forms or to earlier time periods. The quest for vital roots can never fully succeed, because the regression to the past is never permanent: the quester must still confront the exigencies of the present.

The introductory essay presents the history of vitalism, first seen as a biological movement: approaching World War I vitalist criteria are applied to philosophy. I then take the essential vitalist criteria and apply them to poetry, and show, by examining the poetry of D.H. Lawrence through Dylan Thomas to Ted Hughes, that there is a vitalist movement in modern poetry.

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RESUME

Cette thèse traite de poésie vitaliste. Les poèmes sont divisés en cinq parties. Chaque partie explore une des différentes phases de la recherche vitaliste. Ce besoin de recherche s'avère être en proportion directe avec les modes de vie modernes, orientés vers la technologie. C'est avant tout une recherche de sources; les sources vitales que l'on trouve plutôt dans des environnements organiques que technologiques. Cette recherche ressemble souvent à une regression vers des formes de vie plus primitives ou encore plus éloignées. Mais la recherche des sources vitales ne peut jamais réussir complètement car le retour au passé n'est jamais permanent. Le chercheur doit toujours répondre aux exigences du présent.

Cet essai introductif raconte l'histoire du vitalisme, qui a d'abord été considéré comme un mouvement biologique. A l'approche de la première guerre mondiale les critères vitalistes ont été appliqués à la philosophie. Je prendrai ensuite les critères vitalistes essentiels et les appliquerai à la poésie. Je démontrerai, en examinant la poésie de D.H. Lawrence à Ted Hughes, en passant par Dylan Thomas, que le mouvement vitaliste existe dans la poésie moderne.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Alan Heuser for his help in the preparation of this thesis.

I would also like to thank Charles Lambert for sharing his genius and inspiration.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this brief introduction to my poetry, I shall be doing the following. First, because I consider my poems to be vitalist poetry, I will give a historical background to what I call the vitalist movement, because up until World War I, its context was strictly biological and philosophical. Then, I will show how this bio-philosophy evolved into a modern literary movement, but I want to make clear that vitalism's roots began in a context that was very unliterary.

After a redefinition of the movement, I will point to poetry proper as a vital communication, and survey the vitalist movement in poetry through examples from D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, Theodore Roethke, Gary Snyder, James Dickey and Ted Hughes. In concluding, I will apply this evidence to my own poetry in the form of a brief synopsis.

Vitalism as a bio-philosophy

Though vitalism was not named as such during his lifetime, Aristotle, in his treatise On the Soul and on the Generation of Animals, identified the life or psyche of an organism, and he also located purposeful activity and embryological development within the organism. This unnamed vitalism was left undeclared until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when, with the scientific skepticism of Bacon, Kepler and Galileo, a mechanical view of the world began to impose its rationale on seventeenth century man. It was at this time that the modern method of scientific investigation emerged and out of this method, the question "what is life" was asked within the context of the new learning, but we should note that the answer had now to satisfy

the new scientific criteria.

In 1687 Isaac Newton's Principia was published, which set forth the idea that the sun, stars and planets were governed by a single law of universal gravitation holding the universe together. The Newtonian universe explained the world of nature in terms of mechanics. Finding Newton's philosophy unsatisfactory in accounting for the processes of nature, John Needham, English naturalist and Roman Catholic clergyman, began in the 1740's to question the mystery of biological life. We can assume that he found the current religious as well as mechanical explanations deficient, so it was to his laboratory he turned for an answer. Eventually, he became an advocate of the theory of spontaneous generation of life from inorganic matter. He also supported the vitalist doctrine that life's processes could not be explained merely by the laws of physics and chemistry. He was the first to present a theory of spontaneous generation, using scientific evidence to support his case (Encyclopaedia Britannica 3, Micropaedia VII, 240).

In the early nineteenth century vitalism became an attempt to distinguish living from non-living things. "Essentially, vitalism holds that there exists in all living things an intrinsic factor - elusive, inestimable, and unmeasurable - that activates life" (Op. Cit., Macropaedia, XII, 873). It is thus, primarily, "A metaphysical doctrine concerning the nature of living organisms" (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, VIII, 253). It holds, first, that in every living organism there is an entity that is not exhaustively composed of inanimate parts, and, second, that the activities characteristic of living organisms are due, in some sense, to the activities of this entity.

"All vitalists have, for example, held that the life of an organism is a particular, not a universal...and that it is an agent for possessing some degree of autonomy with respect to the body it animates" (Ibid., p. 254).

In the most primitive kinds of vitalism, the life essence is flatly identified with a material fluid, or the breath, or the blood. This is called naive vitalism, and from Needham to Driesch the movement produced many confused notions and theories. Vitalism was seen as a formative impulse, or type of animal heat or animal electricity or indefinable life-force.

In 1888 Frederick Nietzsche wrote Twilight of the Idols, which in many ways capitulates his philosophical thoughts of the fifteen years preceding. In reading this monumental work one cannot help but notice that much of what Nietzsche writes resembles not philosophy proper, but rather a bio-philosophy. First of all, he denounced Schopenhauer's defeatist philosophy as the "Attempt of genius to marshal, in aid of a nihilistic total devaluation of life, the very counter-instances, the great affirmation of the will to live" (Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. Hollingdale, 1st ed., p. 79). Nietzsche believed that having to combat one's instincts was a formula for decadence. He writes, "I formulate a principle. All naturalism is morality, that is all healthy morality is dominated by an instinct for life" (Ibid., p. 45). Later on he writes, "To call the taming of an animal its improvement is in our ears almost a joke....They are weakened, they are made less harmful, they become sickly beasts through the depressive emotion of fear" (Ibid., p. 55-56). Eventually Nietzsche, didactically, is compelled to restate his two most powerful life-affirming

principles: the will-to-power principle and the Dionysian principle. The first is aimed at survival of the strongest, and the second is aimed at a sensual celebration of the essence of life according to the morality principle inherent in nature.

With Hans Driesch (1867-1941) critical vitalism emerged as a more sophisticated approach to the mystery of life. Driesch defined vitalism as, "The theory of the autonomy of the processes of life" (Op. Cit., p. 255). He admitted that the laws of physics and chemistry apply to organic changes, but, for example, in the first division of a fertilized ovum, physics and chemistry could not explain why the steps occur where and when they do. Scientific proofs by analogy were brought forth. Wilhelm Roux (1850-1924), a biologist, severed the eggs of frogs and urchins in two: each developed into a perfect but half-sized larva. It was concluded that no machine could regenerate in such a spectacular fashion after it had been chopped in two. Of course, this biological movement was doomed to failure, because it attempted to prove empirically that organic life could evolve from inorganic substance.

But if the movement gradually died approaching World War I, the question regarding the mystery of life was intensified against the sudden expansion of modern technology. In 1907, from a meta-biological point of view, Henri Bergson came out with his celebrated L'évolution créatrice. Like the vitalists, Bergson interpreted evolution as the outcome of an impulse of life (élan vital) and that this impulse was passed on from generation to generation. And in conjunction with the vitalist view that life processes are not explicable by the laws of chemistry and physics,

Bergson differentiated between two types of time. One is scientific time and the other is real duration or pure time. The latter does not correspond to scientific time, but to our direct experience: it is an irreversible succession of states, indivisible and heterogeneous (Ibid., II, 3287-94).

Vitalism defined in a literary context

So as a scientific movement, vitalism died, but if we examine vitalism in a modern literary context we will see that although the mystery of life could not be satisfactorily explained, the urge, or yearning to be with various forms of natural life that demonstrated or symbolized vitalism, became all the more evident.

So, when we refer to the literary evidence, vitalism is still an outstanding quest; however, the issue is no longer to define the life-essence which preoccupied late nineteenth century thought; but, in the modern world of technology or inorganic environments, vitalism is the urge or verb of wanting to be with vital life forms: to sit beneath a tree instead of a skyscraper, to celebrate the movement of animals instead of bulldozers. The life-essence is to be intuitively felt; not to be defined and caged within intellectual limits. So as a literary movement, vitalism appeals, stimulates and awakens the senses: this awakening takes place in primordial rather than in mechanical environments. Vitalist doctrine ^{now} sees consciousness as the enemy - inorganic, abstract, metaphysical. Thus, the logical positivist movement of the 1930's which denounced metaphysics, may be seen as a philosophical buttress to the vitalist movement.

Vitalist expression will find its outlets in areas which emphasize organic processes: such as the behavior of animals, other life forms in nature, and primitive man dynamically interacting with these processes. The setting for this man-nature-animal interaction is often staged in an evolutionary epoch of the past, where spontaneity and vitality were as natural as breathing.

There can be no mistake that the vitalist movement clashes head on with the claims of technology. Implicit in vitalist doctrine are nihilistic tendencies; an outright if not absolute rejection of the mechanized present in preference for what existed in the simpler past, in terms of vitalist expression. This preference for the conditions of the past often takes on the form of a regression, or what Kenneth Burke calls "infantilism," be it the infancy of a man or another species: what matters is the vitality refound through the regression (return).

From the above definition, we can see that the new vitalism, though based on the principles of the older version, is unique, but as a modern movement in literature, and as an attitude among the young (the Beat and Hippie movements) it is still in the underground.

Before examining the vitalist poets in detail, I think it is important to show how poetry is a vital medium of expression as opposed to prose.

Poetry as a vital communication

If poetry is a more vital medium of expression than prose, there should be evidence to support this. Two contemporary authorities, Arthur Koestler and Northrop Frye, testify to the evocative power of rhythmic patterns as follows:

Rhythmic periodicity is a fundamental characteristic of life...that our remarkable responsiveness to rhythmically patterned stimuli and our readiness to become patterned ourselves arises from the depths of the nervous system, from those archaic strata of the unconscious.

(Koestler, The Act of Creation, 1975 ed., p. 311)

The principle of recurrence in the rhythm of art seems to be derived from the repetitions in nature that make time intelligible to us. Rituals cluster around the cyclical movements of the sun, the moon, the seasons, and human life. Every crucial periodicity of experience...gets rituals attached to

(Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 1957, p. 105)

Therefore, it is not unexceptionable to observe that rhythmic expression in both ritual and poetry is that same instinctive fulfilment which prompts patterns of social behavior and orders unconscious thought.

Poetry, children's in particular, gives us striking examples of vital rhythms, for in all rhyming verse, there is a periodical repetition of the same end-sound, which satisfies the likeness of a primitive ritual. This type of repetition (ritual) is obviously more pronounced in poetry than prose. But the very fact that much poetry is comprised of couplets or of stanzas - frequent beginnings and endings - is another sign of the inherent vitalism in both repeated rhythm and rhyme. Furthermore, poetry is primarily an aural medium, highly concerned with the rhythmic effects of its sounds: prose is intended to be read by the eye. Poetry is like the hunt, intense and shortlived; prose resembles a mechanical operation, its operations and climaxes are extended, its form is ultimately less throbbing. If every instant and event in life has its own unique rhythm and impulse, poetry, more than prose, dedicates itself to the essences of these rhythms.

Vitalist poetry proper

So far, I have been trying to show how vitalism, whether in the biological or in the literary tradition, has developed as a reaction against the various scientific and mechanical precepts.

In turning to the vitalist poets proper we find that the same relationship between man and the mechanical becomes even more pronounced, as poets intensify their seeking of vital life forms not only to remind themselves of their own vitality, but as if to further repudiate the gods of technology. It was in such an atmosphere that the animal poetry of D.H. Lawrence emerged.

After World War I had ended, following in its footsteps were accelerations in technology and the maturing despair of a lost generation leading to the anguish of existentialism. In fact, existentialism, as a philosophy of pain and anguish - both vital human emotions - was no doubt a reaction to the nothingness of the many artificial, inorganic, devitalized environments technology was rapidly manufacturing. Lawrence, as a sensitive poet and novelist, was well aware of these dehumanizing trends and was obviously disgusted by them. It was in this frame of mind that his crusade against the interfering intellect took shape, in both his poetics and his poetry. Lawrence felt that man's psychological balance was destroyed by the strains placed upon him through the necessity of following the artificial routines of convention. And thus, his eager desire to commune with natural forces led him to an imaginative study of birds, beasts and flowers, which to all seemed living evidence of a primordial, instinctive existence in which man had once participated, but from which he was now, to his destruction, cut off (Reeves, ed., Selected Poems of D.H. Lawrence, 1967 ed., pp. 5-6). Lawrence felt that the act of writing a poem was one of the means available to counteract the

devitalizing realities of his time.

In the introduction to his New Poems (1920) he writes:

But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished...The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both...Let me feel the mud and the heavens in my lotus. Let me feel the heavy, silting, sucking mud, the spinning of sky winds...There is poetry of this immediate present, instant poetry...everything left in its own rapid, fluid relationship with the rest of things.

(Lawrence, The Collected Poems of D.H. Lawrence, 1964, I, 182-4)

Inspired by the example of Walt Whitman, Lawrence saw the freedom and potential to be realized in free verse, "We can get rid of the stereotyped movement and the old hackneyed associations of sound and sense...We can break the stiff neck of habit" (Ibid., p. 184). On the same subject, Koestler writes:

When rhythm assumes a rigidly repetitive form, it no longer recalls the pulsation of life, but the motions of an automaton; its superimposition on human behavior is degrading, and yields Bergson's formula of the comic: the mechanical encrusted on the living.

(Koestler, The Act of Creation, 1975 ed., p. 312)

Lawrence adds, "In free verse we look for the insurgent throb of the instant moment" (CP, p. 185). We see what he intends in "Doe at Evening," a poem whose vital rhythms capture the urgency of survival as a doe attracts the attention of a human, to protect her fawn.

As I went through the marshes
a doe sprang out of the corn
and flashed up the hill-side
leaving her fawn.

(CP, 222)

In one of my own poems, "Time Bows to the Gene," I attempt to capture a similar moment of urgency:

a Uganda Kob nicks a dash of salt,
his wide eyes of fright
palpitate in the stillness

(Thesis page 42 below)

As mentioned earlier, inherent in vitalist doctrine are sentiments denigrating the values of consciousness. In the poem "Snake," Lawrence, after hitting the snake, which is a living symbol of primordial existence, deeply regrets the act:

And immediately I regretted it,
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.
(CP, 351)

He realizes that it is this education, this mind-warping, that has cut him off from the nature of things in general, including the real nature of his true self. Thus, in "Humming-Bird," he longs to go back to the very central pulse of nature, but when contemplating the qualities of a primordial existence, he finds the un-humanness strange and frightening.

I can imagine, in some other world
Primeval-dumb, far back
In that most awful stillness, that only gasped and hummed.
(CP, 372)

It is almost as if this fear is that part of himself - the instinctive - which he is unwilling to come to terms with, or at least so suddenly. In "Man and Bat," he struggles with a bat, and tries to chase him out of the room, but the bat, or the instinctive or primordial self, will not allow this to happen.

He could not go out,
I also realized...
...It was the light of day which he could not enter

...
 It was asking too much of his nature
 (CP, 344)

If nihilism is central to vitalism, Lawrence, "In the Cities," employs direct imagery to make his point:

In the cities
 there is even no more any weather
 the weather in town is always benzine, or else petrol fumes
 lubricating oil, exhaust gas.

(CP, 703)

The climax of this stanza is in the third line, and one cannot help but notice that its inordinate length resembles a mechanical line of prose rather than a line of poetry.

In oscillating between the vital animal and lifeless machine, contrast and conflict are natural means to bring out civilization's discontents.

We see this clearly in Lawrence's "A Living:"

A man should never earn his living,
 if he earns his life he'll be lovely

A bird
 picks up its seeds or little snails
 between the heedless earth and heaven
 in heedlessness.

(CP, 443)

Here, the routine is contrasted with a spontaneous act of life.

This literary technique of conflicting images can be more fruitfully examined in the next vitalist poet Dylan Thomas, whose awareness of the technique comes out as follows:

I make one image - though 'make' is not the word; I let, perhaps, an image be 'made' emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess - let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it the seed of its own destruction,

and my dialectical method, as I understand it, is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time...Out of the inevitable conflict of images...the womb of war - I try to make that momentary peace which is the poem.

(Treece, Dylan Thomas, 1949, p. 37)

This, what we may now call literary technique of conflict (not just of images, but stanzas, ideas, and even complete poems) becomes an extremely effective way of developing vitalist themes.

Thomas often regresses back to his youth or boyhood, and in this regression there is that implicit conflict of youth contending with time, or ageing, and the battle is a hopeless one. Thus, in "The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower" Thomas acknowledges the paradox that the same force which was once a source of vitality is now the thing pushing him towards death.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that drives the mouthing stream
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

(Thomas, Collected Poems, 1934-52, 1952, p. 9)

This acknowledgement of paradox of the life-death force appears like a mature acceptance of the inevitable, a transcendence of sorts, but because the inevitability is really speaking of death, we are still left with the feeling of regret for a vitality, or force, which once moved us with life. The American poet Philip Wheelwright, in trying to explain, not the paradox itself, but the effect of paradox writes:

When a poet tries not merely to startle by paradox but to express truth through paradox, he may do so at either first or second remove: his voice will be either that of the prophet proclaiming the ineluctable paradoxicality of the real or else that of the poet as such manipulating the powers of his craft to produce a paradoxical interplay between statement and innuendo.

(Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain, 1966, p. 98)

Poetic self-division, as distinguished from schizophrenia, is not a breakdown, but a vibrant tension between meanings which are antithetical yet surreptitiously related.

(Ibid., p. 86)

In "Poem in October" this paradox or tension between the present age of a man, and his recollections of youth produce what I see as a vitalist vision, or nostalgiac myth. This is especially true if one reads "Fern Hill" before "Poem in October," because in the former, the poet isn't contemplating the "carefree" days of youth among the "barns" and "hay;" the reading or writing of the poem is in fact the spontaneous celebration of youth, a sort of direct empathy via words, or words giving material substance to fantasy. In "Poem in October" the image of spontaneity is destroyed by the poet's present age, 30 years, and the resulting synthesis is nostalgia, which manifests like a vision:

And the twice told fields of infancy
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in
mine...

...And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun.

(CP, pp. 103-4)

The intensity of this type of vision increases in proportion to one's ageing. Time is vitality's arch enemy because there is no absolute state of vitality; and with the passing of time and the diminishing of one's personal vitality it is not the external things in themselves that change, but one's outlook. In "Fern Hill" the sun is the roof for carefree play as a youth, while in "Poem in October" this same sun has turned green leaves into blood-coloured leaves. It is the dual role of this force (time) which enables both poet and reader to zero in on the true joys of youth. The strategies of conflict or dialectic (ironic or

otherwise) set up the teams, and because time's team never loses in the long run, youth, the perpetual underdog, becomes even closer to our hearts.

Like Thomas, Theodore Roethke, in "Praise to the End," also celebrates the spontaneous freedom of childhood, but unlike the Thomas farm setting, Roethke, in a primitive marsh, regresses to the almost embryonic sensations of a child:

I romped, lithe as a child, down the summery streets of my
veins
Strict as a seed, nippy and twiggy.
Now the water's low. The weeds exceed me.
(Roethke, Collected Poems, 1975, p. 82)

Later on in the poem, his verse takes on the form of a child's nursery rhyme, which reflects the intensity of his desperation to return not just to childhood, but to the very seed of life itself.

Mips and ma the mooly moo,
The likes of him is biting who,
A cow's a care and who's a coo?
(CP, 82)

If simple rhyming is a satisfying vitalist device, I do the same in "Heidelbergstasis:"

he hobbles to his home
lets out a final groan,
then rolls out his rump
for the ice-age to hump
(Thesis page 51)

One should note that Roethke's plunges into the primordial past are necessary to understand the self in the present. If he were to remain in the past, he would be a regressionist rather than a quester of self awareness.

O birds and s all fish, surround me.
Lave me, ultimate waters.

The dark showed me a face.
 My ghosts are all gay.
 The light becomes me.

(CP, 84)

It is common for vitalist poets to use the past to illuminate the present. What Lawrence calls "primeval-dumb" Roethke calls "mindless," this quality of the deep and ancient past. In my poem "Homestead Holiday" I reverse the time perspective in order to express a similar illumination. Instead of having man look into his evolutionary past, I have an animal looking into his evolutionary future.

A belching grizzly
 sneers through the slit
 of a stumped redwood and observes
 this bashing of being
 this searing of sensitivity
 this lynching of life
 then grimaces in the gratitude
 of his consciousnessless evolution.
 Berries to the sun
 to be a bear.

(Thesis page 63)

Roethke is conscious of the fact that in regressing, whether to boyhood, animalhood, or to an earlier epoch, he is rendered divided in a schizophrenic sense. In "Four for John Davies," he writes:

Between such animal and human heat
 I find myself perplexed.

(CP, 101)

The reality of a divided-self can be seen as a conflict, in the Thomas-like sense, not just of images, but also of time periods (the conscious present as opposed to the unconscious past). And of course, as mentioned earlier in the literary definition of vitalism, there is an implicit nihilism in vitalist thought: a preference for the mud instead of the mechanical, for the might instead of the mind. In "The Lost Son" we have both a conflict of

time periods and images.

Let the kisses resound, flat like a butcher's palm;
 Let the gestures freeze, our doom is already decided.
 All the windows are burning! What's left of my life?
 I want the old rage, the lash of primordial milk!

(CP, 53)

In my own poem, "Head the Ease," I not only employ a conflict of time periods, but I deliberately emphasize the conflict, "Riding backs of gators / Head returned from the office and sipped his bourbon straight," for the purpose of developing one of the key issues of my poetry, that of catharsis. In almost all of the cases, the rhythm of the catharsis contains a pulse that no longer imitates, but directly conveys a vital life instant.

o renegade of the everglades
 o wild-man of the marshes
 fling me a twine,
 already I taste the naked honeys
 of your fecund throne,
 and you, o tenderest of snakes,
 your poignant juices-awaken me to a baptism

(Thesis page 39)

In yet another version of the vitalist quest, Gary Snyder takes us to the back country, which happens to be the title of one of his books of poetry. From working as a logger and forest ranger to studying Zen in Japan, one can see that he has tried to make reality of this quest, and to a certain extent, he has perhaps succeeded, if only temporarily. He tries to capture some of these temporary moments in his poetry.

His expression of vitalism is often found in memories of relationships with people from both the East and West. This sense of people becomes tribal, and frequently, the places where he selectively chooses to remember them are earthy, fecund settings. From "Nansen:"

I found you on a rainy morning
 After a typhoon
 In a bamboo grove at Kaitoku-ji
 (Snyder, The Back Country, 1958, p. 50)

In describing a woman with whom he has made love, he embellishes her with imagery not from a jewelry store on 42nd street, but from images taken from an earlier epoch. The woman described emerges unhumanly pure, spontaneous, yet still desirable. From "The Manichaeans:"

Your body is a fossil
 As you rest with your chin back
 --your arms are still flippers
 your lidded eyes lift from a swamp
 (BC, 76)

In fossilizing her he wishes to preserve her in that state of primal simplicity, for it is these qualities which hold the secrets of her charm upon Snyder.

From these plush, idyllic scenes of the back country, Snyder, consistent with vitalist strategies, nihilistically brings us to the effete present. In the poem "Oil" Snyder sees progress as an addiction, grinding towards inorganic goals.

the ship burns with a furnace heart
 steam veins and copper nerves
 quiver and slightly twists and always goes...
 ...baring what all these
 crazed, hooked nations need:
 steel plates and
 long injections of pure oil. (BC, 26)

The hooked nations needing injections captures in a metaphor the heroin habit, which is preponderantly an urban, and not a rural manifestation.

Another contemporary American poet, James Dickey, like Lawrence and Ted Hughes - to be examined later - finds the expression of vitalism best represented through the actions of animals. In "A Dog Sleeping On My

Feet," from Drowning With Others, whose title suggests both nihilism and catharsis, the theme of the divided-self emerges, for the dog at his feet puts his legs to sleep (i.e. the human part), and as this happens, a poem begins to write itself out, on the subject of a fox pursuit, "With the scent of the fox / burning my brain like an incense." But then, the dogs on the hunt remind him of his humanness again, and he contemplates the reassembling he must do, in order to get rid of the animal (or poem) his wife and children will not be able to relate to.

Floating out of the night wood,
Coming home to my wife and my sons
From the dream of an animal
Assembling the self I must wake to,
Sleeping to grow back my legs.

(Dickey, Poems, 1957-1967, 1968, p. 56)

Again we are presented with yet another variation of the Thomas conflict of images. In this instance, the poet is destroying the image of his animal self (perhaps the source of his genius) for the sake of family proprieties. So what Dickey is in fact doing, is presenting us with an ironic conflict of selves. I endeavor to do the same in the poem "Epoch Schizophrenia:"

awake to the warp:
an antelope bone
prefaces the one hand,
Fortran fingers the other:

(Thesis page 93)

Like Thomas, Dickey yearns to return to the tranquil places of boyhood. In "The Sleep Child" the rural setting of the farm provides an initial contrast with the inevitability of adulthood.

Farm boys wild to couple
With anything with soft-wooded trees
With mounds of earth mounds

Of pinestraw will keep themselves off
Animals by legends of their own:

(P, 252)

If consciousness is one of the natural enemies of vitalism, Dickey, in "The Heaven of Animals" presents us with an idyllic scene of animals, capturing both their peace and spontaneity.

Here they are. The soft eyes open.
If they have lived in a wood
It is a wood.
If they have lived on plains
It is grass rolling
Under their feet forever.
Having no souls, they have come,
Anyway, beyond their knowing.

(P, 59-60)

His views on the acquisition of knowledge echo the sentiments of Lawrence.

No hunter has taught me this call;
It comes out of childhood and playgrounds.

. . .

With the palest and gentlest of children,
Whom the years have turned deadly with knowledge.

(C, 64-65)

Many vitalists find the act of the hunt (the kill), whether symbolic or not, the most representative act of survival. Thirty years later, both Dickey and Ted Hughes go further than Lawrence, who recognized the inevitability of aggression, but he did not condone it as a legitimate vitalist expression.

In "The Legacy of Instant Results," I try to show how a simple football game is simply a biological manifestation of the hunt, whose intensity is sublimated through ritual.

Hunters play the Skins,
 a break from modern delays,
 think, kill, eat and run
 a manifestation of Heidelberg days.

(Thesis page 53)

As in Lawrence's "Humming Bird," Dickey, when empathizing with the primordial past, ghostly and haunting verse emerges. This is to say that a primordial return isn't as simple as we wish to think, and it certainly goes beyond the writing about what it would be like. A sacred fragility is most powerfully evoked by Dickey in "The Salt Marsh."

Once you have let the first blade
 Spring back behind you
 To the way it has always been,
 You no longer know where you are.

. . .

Your spine tingles crystallly, like salt,
 And the image of a crane occurs.

(P, 107-108)

This haunting insecurity of a man trying to find his roots in nature, by trying to become the roots (absolute empathy) is expressed like Dickey, by Ted Hughes, in his poem "Wodwo," where the narrator, at a river's edge, steps into the grassy waters and begins to ask timeless questions.

Do these weeds
 know me and name me to each other have they
 seen me before, do I fit in their world?

(Hughes, Selected Poems, 1957-67, 1972, p. 109)

In my poem "Rite Wild," the protagonist Head tries to force a similar discovery, but in this instance, using comedy as the means to catharsis, the haunting concludes with the comical, but one should remember that comedy is a nervous reaction to fear.

Hovering over the slippery sheen
 of an ancient lake
 adjacent to the rib cage
 of a defeated dinosaur,
 Head stands before his reflection
 and practices emulation:
 he wets his pants.

(Thesis page 36)

I suppose one could say that he wets his pants like a frightened school boy. But in spite of the psychological obstacles, neither Wodwo nor Head are deterred from their search. Hughes writes in "Wodwo:"

I seem
 separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped
 out of nothing casually...
 ...here's the water
 again very queer but I'll go on looking

(SP, 109)

All of my Head poems similarly describe an unsure search, where the self questions itself in an uncertain present. In both cases (Head and Wodwo) the protagonists are not aware of what they are questing for, because the goals of the vitalist quest can only be discovered intuitively, and not intellectually, especially since the vitalist movement is still at a seminal stage of development. Hughes writes, "All imaginative writing is to some extent the voice of what is neglected or forbidden, hence its connections with the past in a nostalgic vein and the future in a revolutionary vein" (Hughes, Poetry in the Making, 1962, p. 51).

Like Lawrence and Dickey, Hughes finds vitality in the animal world, but he also believes if he can discover some of the mysteries of animals, he will come to know himself better. "I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals...they know something

special, something perhaps which we are very curious to learn" (Ibid., p. 15). As does Roethke, he uses the past to illuminate the present.

In "Thrushes," vitalism springs into action via the act of predation. Preparing for the kill the heart begins to palpitate, adrenalin rushes into the body's network, and we find an animal in a trance, absolutely and unconsciously dedicated to survive.

Terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes on the lawn,
More coiled steel than living - a poised
Dark deadly eye, those delicate legs
Triggered to stirrings beyond sense - with a start, a bounce,
a stab.

(SP, 53)

In this same poem, the ironic conflict of images and time epochs produces the desired effect: the vital élan of the animal is set against the sluggish conscious sentience of man.

...and the shark's mouth
That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own...
...With a man it is otherwise. Heroism on horseback,
Outstripping his desk-diary at a broad desk,
Carving at a tiny ivory ornament
For years: his act worships itself

(SP, 53)

The animal (shark or thrush) embodies the essence of being alive, while man is seen as something less than that ultimate state of vitality.

Conclusion

Up to this point, I have traced some of the themes and literary techniques employed by a few of the more outstanding vitalist poets, and have shown how my own poetry is similar to theirs within the criteria of the vitalist movement. But I feel that I have a few of my own distinctive contributions to vitalist poetry which may be suggested in a brief synopsis of the poems to follow.

First, I divide my poetry into five distinct sequences: each sequence represents a phase of the vitalist quest. In sequence I, "Dread Head," the protagonist Head is desperately trying to latch on to a pure form of vitalism, a desperation prompted by "Pistons and Cranks." In the character Head, the use of a mask enables both the writer and reader to identify with the personal and universal trials and tribulations of the quest.

Sequence II, "Colliding Epochs," is a statement of the conditions which set the stage for the quest. Man is depicted as a divided being, having to answer to both his culturally determined present and his instinctively determined past. Where vitalist poets proper pit vitalism against mechanism, I elaborate on this struggle by employing several related conflicts such as naturism against science, voluntarism against rationalism, primitivism against sophistication, and tribalism against urbanism. To emphasize the magnitude of these struggles I employ harsh incongruities and severe juxtapositions in time and space, and I also deliberately insert excessive alliteration to increase the need for resolution of the struggle, which should intensify to such a degree that the resolution emerges in the form of a catharsis, only realizable through emotions and gut rhythms, for I believe that vitalist truths cannot be communicated in a pragmatic or rational fashion: as we have seen, vitalist poetry, from Lawrence to Hughes, is anti-intellectual.

Sequence III, "Red Fables and Dude Cases," consists of a series of tragi-comic fables and case histories, revealing the quester to be either

denounced for his endeavor, or totally alienated from his environment, sometimes to the point of death.

In sequence IV, "My Raging Head," the protagonist Head removes his mask and we are given glimpses of the author's personal relationship with the vitalist quest. In this sequence in particular, the author attempts to bring about, therapeutically if you like, a release or catharsis of the total individual, geared towards a salvation of the vital life impulse, which today is increasingly succumbing to the feelingless efficiency of technology.

Sequence V, "Head's End," depicts the inevitability of modern technologies eliminating the possibility of a successful quest, for in questing after vitalism, man renders himself schizophrenic, warped by the pull of conflicting time periods. He would like to regress completely, but he cannot because of the relentless pressures of modern times which ever increasingly compel a free spirited individual to conform to precepts, based not on human needs, but on technological concerns. So in a sense, we may conclude that vitalism is more easily realized through the medium of words (vicariously), which are symbols, than in everyday life. At best, in the everyday world, we can salvage moments of vitalism, moments which will become more and more precious to us, as mass-man's inorganic environments continue to spread throughout the globe.

As a final point, I have stated that vitalism, as a literary movement, is undefined in literary criticism, that it has not been recognized by the critics as a movement. I have also demonstrated that the essence of vitalism, both in biology and literature, has not yet been discovered,

that the mystery of life is still a mystery. However, during the past 50 years, there have been spotted scientific discoveries, suggesting the possibility, that the vitalist urge, or quest, is not merely an inference or intuited hunch, but may be based on obscure neuro-physiological principles only partly understood. In other words the mysteries of life cannot be explained, but the trying to, or desire to be near these mysterious, insurgent throbs of life is explainable.

The first of these provoking discoveries, as told by Arthur Koestler in The Act of Creation, involved a German surgeon, O. Forster, who in 1929, operated on a tumour which was situated in the third ventricle of the brain, a small cavity deep down in the phylogenetically ancient regions of the mid-brain. When Forster began to manipulate the tumour, the patient burst out into a manic flight of speech exhibiting sound associations with every word: with the word Tupfer, he said Jupfer, Hupfer, Hupfen, and so on. This report of surgery suggested to Koestler that in the brain there is a centre for speech rhythms, which can be satisfied only through punning or alliteration. This may explain why vitalist poetry, which has many regressive tendencies within its criteria, emerges in the onomatopoeic way it does, and that writing with vitalist urgency may be an unconscious response to commands of the lower brain, which under stress, must be appeased in one way or another (Koestler, The Act of Creation, pp. 315-316).

A second similar discovery was made by Dr. Paul MacLean, who in his article, "Man and his Animal Brains," takes the evolutionary view that the human brain has gone through three stages of advance. The oldest and

most central portion of the brain (reptilian brain) was responsible for instinctively determined functions such as establishing territory, finding shelter, hunting and mating, etc. But in time, this older brain became clumsy when confronted with novel situations, and a newer and better brain was required, however, the older reptilian brain wasn't discarded. Instead, a new brain, a lobe of primitive cortex molded by the forces of natural selection, evolved, and it surrounded the older reptilian brain. One should note that this second layer of brain (mammalian brain) has had ample evolutionary time to perfect its connections and communications with the older reptilian. The neural connections between these two animal brains are so strong that some nerve bundles are as thick as a lead pencil. But the newest and final layer of brain, the neo-cortex, which appeared as a distinct feature of monkeys and apes - and it was in this new structure that the homonid explosion took place approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ million years ago - MacLean notes that there 'has not been enough evolutionary time for this new brain to perfect its connections with the older brains (MacLean, "Man and his Animal Brains," Modern Medicine, 1964, pp. 221-222).

Thus, this discovery suggests that our human behavior is often, particularly when under stress, modified to the obscure patterns of the older brains, which would have been incapable of conceiving of a past or a future, but were limited in scope to the spontaneity of the moment: that we do carry with us a genetic legacy of animal instincts, over which we do not have complete control, as MacLean has demonstrated physiologically. That is why people are often described by animal metaphors and similes

or in beast fables, and why people, on certain occasions, act with animal abandon, especially our primitives, our children: we have all heard and perhaps have used the expression "Stop acting like an animal." From this, it may be suggested that primitive behavior, based on commands of the animal brains, is somehow satisfying, and may in part explain our high culture's excessive preoccupation with neo-cortical depressants, such as drugs and alcohol, which allow the older behavioral mechanisms to surface more easily.

At this stage, it is certainly fair to suggest that there may be a neuro-physiological basis to the literary vitalist movement, and that many of the sound and speech patterns peculiar to vitalist poetry may be derived from such ancient patterns. Going back, actually or ritualistically, may be biologically necessary at certain stages in individual and social development, and when a going-back has not reached a level of cognitive recognition, a quest is then occurring, and as we have seen in vitalist poetry, when the quest runs into a misdirection or dead end, the ways, forces, and throbs of the words remain, to remind us that the quester has not given up. Koestler, most aptly summing up the spirit behind vitalist poetry, writes, "The creative act always involves a regression to earlier, more primitive levels in the mental hierarchy, while other processes continue simultaneously on the rational surface" (Op. Cit., p. 316).

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HEAD

I. DREAD HEAD

PISTONS AND CRANKS

piston in your brain

crankshaft up your ass:

a telltale of technicalities

the screwer bolts

the pulley pouts

a slick seminar of syncopation

emotions sputter to machine shops

piping for petrol transfusions:

dreams of chemists

compound in confusion

genetic ball-bearings chromosome behavior patterns:

a live wire dashes to a monastery

but gets coppered along the way

plug into my day

and I'll laser you a ray

with carburetor spray:

the ballad of transmission telepathy

along a broken beach of oil-aches

a fightless hunter

returns to his cave

then turns himself into a fossil

empty chairs rustle for buttock

a bed spread sneaks away from its sheet

HEAD ACHE

Head has wasted many dawns
and has consumed the night
in desperate compensation.

Head's ears
seek the soundless comforts
that lie painless beneath his pillow:
his alarm clock clamouring
memoires of the wake.

Soft swings of light
smother
the darkness of the lowlands
whose grasses yawn,
then burst in excitation.

The darkness,
in one final effort
to extend its stay,
plants itself pillary
on the edge of the prairie
then slowly resolves without pain
into day:
cotton wisps
spatter the blue air,
sweet skins of scent
shift through out the garden ways.

The closet of decorum
sponges Head to his act:
he gathers up the walkways
with a tick of concrete thought,
then settles into his chair
greeting the do day.

BLED HEAD

hUNg-heard: due-bitten:
crestfallen in a cubicle of concrete:
an out-citizen watches turbulence
slip through his brain:
 he popes like a parasite
 to save an integrity,
 he pilfers from the womb of discard

in a shrinking crack, between
bad-planned buildings,
aggression jumps into the capsule
of a shotgun shell
and befriends pal-guilt in the cut of twilight:
they fuse to a gymnasium
where a hoard of busy bodies
topple off their lives
into a deal of dividends and a waterless well
that swells with wish-moans:
 a shameless sleep in silicone,
 changelessness in a night time:
the need now nullified
it knots in a smile

searching soreness
saddles the boiling brain of day,
while in the ice cream cone of ivory
an in-man properly turns his tie,
slaughters his spine,
cartridges his confidence
then envelope-drives a pile
to a formidable charity

slivers of straw slip from the bottom's head.

HUNG HEAD

Head hunts for a trace of space
that herds in the absurd
but fissions in definition.

He sets out for a swim,
strokes the schizoid
until wrung from the waters
and flung before a jury
condemned to the gauntlet of the plaintiff's disease.

The mild masses
sink in syndromes
then chop-off Head with their heartaches.

Head confronts the noose:
the last light lags
a larynx rasps
one thing left to do.

Eye-balls straight ahead
Head pulls the trigger of a coco-nut tree:
"I'll crack them nuts with my head!"
He makes lever with hope
severs the rope
then sprints to the fringe of a zoo:
breaks into a cage
away from sickly sage
and locks himself inside forever.

Outstretched hairy arm
pointing at you,
testicles dangling between legs,
Head exhales a mucous of breath
then gives this age
abscessed back to you.

RITE WILD

Hovering over the slippery sheen
 of an ancient lake
 adjacent to the rib cage
 of a defeated dinosaur,
 Head stands before his reflection
 and practices emulation:

he wets his pants.

Reptile fluff
 fleeces the foreground
 while thin-legged
 sprinters
 race with the edges
 of the overturning tide:
 freckles of foam fall forward
 on flattened plexuses
 then terminate in a catharsis
 with the sands:
 epithets of this force
 now fry on steamy beach
 while rock
 topples back into the sea.

Head blanks,
 blesses his birth,
 then skips a rock
 to his campsite.

Star suns twitter
 through the loins of his tent,
 he embibes the soul of the grape:
 an homage to sleep,
 kinetics unfound.

..... Morning stirs the stench of his snore,
his belching breath falls to the floor,
"damn hot in this here tent."
He crawls to a nearby stream.

Weekend in the wilds.

HEAD THE EASE

riding backs of gators
 beneath recluse swamps
 where oozing mud
 bathes a spewed upon soul
 like creamy rays from the sun

the new day
 sends snakes and suckers to his side,
 reactions will him
 into the slime of riverbanks,
 feverish croaks of insects his roof,
 ancient vegetation his mind.

Head returned from the office
 and sipped his Bourbon straight.
 Head the ease:

 progenitor of propriety
 perpetrator of appeasement
 the pink of proudness,
 assassin of prunes.

He walls out the barbs
 with electric wire,
 returns to a bed of marshmallows,
 sleeps without dreams
 then awakens to curded milk
 and a wife, whose eyes spit lizards
 and swamp juice.
 Head leaves home, wobbles to work,
 then slits his jugular before the board.

o renegade of the everglades
o wild-man of the marshes
fling me a twine,
already I taste the naked honeys
of your fecund throne,
and you, o tenderest of snakes,
your poignant juices awaken me to a baptism

II. COLLIDING EPOCHS

NATURE'S CARAVAN

Not knowing how to question
a splendid sparrow
mingles with its mate,
chirping, what man must define as love,
to the miracle of freshly analed eggs.

A ranging reptile, with the grace
of a Madonna, but without her games,
drapes its belly
around encient flora
where its other half awaits
in oozing expectancy.

As fictional solace,
man resorts to memory,
the past devouring the future,
leaving an unembodied present
and a mind on the climb
living in the cures of fantasy.

Damning the deluge,
severing from vermin-affairs,
arising from airlessness,
dipping into saving sluices,
exorcism from stagnation,
the tribe hitched up with a gypsy caravan,
the vagabonds we are,
immoral as our instincts.

TIME BOWS TO THE GENE

grappling for the core of the colossal
where a temporary absolute
tempts, then dodges the grasping appendage,
that breathing branch of the brain:

the process boomerangs

rivulets of wrath

then parades

a sureless phase

from its bone-filled catacombs

where the itch of an ancient cicatrice
revives a running query

bush-berries of Tanganyika

hedge the wind-parched veld,

an awkward metaphor

bolts through hacks of grass,

yet the only telling shape

of life's new gait

are the bone-blades scraping the sky:

a band of man

huddles next to the night

while prone bellies

nourish their truculence,

immune from the ambrosia of reasoning

volleyfulls of venom

await a careless lapse,

a Uganda Kob nicks a dash of salt,

his wide eyes of fright

palpitate in the stillness

left with the cold breath
of a Jurassic night
man's new brain
promulgates in the Pleistocene,
milleniums later
amenorrhea of the mind,
that pendulum germ
now for the sapient
whose insights have left
the weather behind
as catapulting consciousness
succeeds him to his death

pawns of the border-strife
make place
for the missiles in waiting:
the archetype of settlement
aligns with the sun

* * * *

bowing to the gene
time cocks its trigger

the globe squirms on its axis

JUNCTION

The cosmos laughed lugubriously
 at templed Buddhists,
 mummies in lotus,
 striking fistless fear
 into the minds
 of the masses, groping.

A triple-eyed musk-ox,
 lumbering in the tundra,
 expectorates the syphilis
 of his tribe's abuse. He covers up
 with brown bog,
 then petrifies with a lonesome log,
 asleep between the dates of a time period.

Snow sneezes dust,
 the slut sleezes powder.
 We puncture our eyes
 then batter-ram the blindness,
 thighs dripping spreads on a crab nested bed,
 the love of an epoch
 fissions in finality,
 infection mothers its end.

Eyes of insight
 bare me a cure.
 My joints paper-rust
 in this plague of an age
 that gallops head-thirst
 for the comforts of kettle,
 seeking breath in metal?

Beneath an underground river of mime
a functionless monastery
peddles awakedness,
human vampires suck up the rhyme.
The urban and suburban
glut out their guilt
while triple-eyed musk-ox
sweats to the sun,
his day has not begun,
he dodges the might
of imminent doom,
he hunts for a saving picture,
but perishes in the wordy scripture,
for him, life has no room.

A one-eyed tortoise
takes up the slack,
shelling the purges of progress.
He's looking for life's dancer,
she's drowning at the crossroads,
two nooses before the abyss.

EQUATIONS

sun-waves
of hot white light
shimmer equationless

The Bedouin Babe
squirts sweat to the sands:
the latest in the schemes of repugnancy.

The tribe's fate
furrows his force
through the pathless sands --
with leather pouched water
noosed around his neck
he's lost his reasons for worry:
the child coughing wind
whimpers in the tent,
legitimate struggle as certainty to health.

A concerned pragmatist,
neck-up-squatting
in hotel-palmed-pool,
urinates brandy
at the corner of a splash --
all proof of composure
medicine's mode for the globe.

Is there tumbling terrain enough,
thump-jerks,
to dunk the assault of rabid ideas,
blindly charging the frenzy of fallacy
in law-binding harmony
with equations to the end.

The pulse accelerates
up the tube to the blast:

600 A.D. An Arabic urchin
 throws stones at his Mosque.

600 B.C. Egyptian tyrants suck their slaves.

26,000 B.C. Cro-Magnon carves for pleasure.

timeless through the still lingering dawn
a wide winged bird
beaks worms to its offspring

NOMADIC INCISION

the bellies of parched sanskrit scrolls
burst in jeering laughter
while stiff scholars
seek complacency in life
from greenless studies
sitting in false conceit
numb to the hunger of jackals lurking near the verandah

an unperturbed nomad walks the world aware
obliviously content
not to know that he knows

a dichotomy the feeble query?
the poles of man's pursuit?

the ascending sun
draws me from words:
the voices of diversity revitalize instinct

Marco Polo trespassing

Bedouin wanderlust

animal catharsis

as sceptres from a defunct grave
books absolve into meaninglessness,
by their nature ancient,
insulting imitation of experience

the nomad embraces his domain

HARD TIMES

Sequential conditioning copulates catastrophically.
The unexpected awaits in ambush:
we perplex
in the perish of paradox.

An armadillo
digs for darkness,
skewed and stagnant in the armour of his evolution.
Anchored in attitude
a guanaco guffaws to the sands.

Wisdom mutates
and heads for the north,
zest for the paws of progress.
Heads in horrification
metaphysically ejaculate:
brain gales juice up the altitudes.

Jovial Java man,
guiltless in the buoyancy of twilight,
totters in his sacred domain.
His moments crucify
as catharsis to the next,
he takes his shade
from a tree.

(
Bats desert their caves
and fly into the spikes of a sunset
seeking compassion's cradle.
A millionaire rolls dice
as a ritual of excitement.
Egg yolks and tea?
He grooves in the placenta of his parlour.

Hard times.

HEIDELBERGSTASIS

a hanging date palm
flagging fate
blandly wavers in the astral air

an ape watches coldly
as the ocean waters flush
and worlds gush
into nothingness

Heidelberg dons his first consciousness,
pokes his thalamus through stages of sediment
only to be burned in a nuclear fission:

taking heed of this vision
he hobbles to his home,
lets out a final groan,
then rolls out his rump
for the ice-age to hump
glacier the inexorable
ice-creams Heidelberg,
the last of ancestral lays

accident's heart
shifts with each stride,
senseless balance
falls by the wayside
smothered in its heaven of changelessness

... sun melts down the pants
of another retreat,
chipped from its depository passage
modern man we greet
engaged in atomic derision:
one big-bang before he falls into the crust
a future anthropologist's must

leap a-head:
from species to pieces

migraine splendor,
brain orgasm at your desk:
all's cool -- all's limbless,
brain-dude is in,
some creator's whim of a boring rainy night
he just couldn't relate to that female bite,
romanced his lab up

brain orgasm ate him up

LEGACY OF INSTANT RESULTS

Frustrated in the fat of primal sublimation,
 muffled by steadiness
 in the nuances of never-knowing,
 five hundred thousand
 roar in their role,
 chasing the meat of instant results.

Football hairies
 tip primality for war
 while the body blushes
 times behind the mind
 it forces the illusion recklessly.

Hunters play the Skins,
 a break from modern delays,
 think, kill, eat and run
 a manifestation of Heidelberg days.

Complexionless Head
 hugs his career:
 the port of patience,
 the dapper of wait,
 at the end of the year
 he snaps his neck
 scratched by the itch for change.

Herds of flamencos
sand-string leg music
to elude the purity of a predator:
mothers on the run
dare not glance back,
crippled child lies on the ground
fast feet approaching,
saliva unbound.

The Hunters succeed,
they neck-tie the Skins,
the losers lope home to mourn.

Battered brain,
scar-faced why,
the fullback falls beneath a shapeless sky,
the weak become the meat,
the limpid the gravy,
the spitting crowd roars on.

LOVE YOUR LEADER

I. Ice Age Aftermath

A passionate address to faithful followers:

the gall stones of an anguished era,
the mindless matter
of a ruptured history.

A leader fastens his decree to be,
an edict stolen
from a rubber god,
then sends week-end blessings
to the bible.

Leader stands before the mirror,
a solemn salute
a wordless vision

he perfects his image
preparing for the applause.
He hallows his balcony,
monologues hysteria
then shakes a sweatless hand
and smiles like a savior.

Ping-pong interplay
is the order of day,
blue chips for the masses:
the earth sleeps sound
on its three legged chair,
I gesture you selflessness,
we'll snuff the boys from bomb.

the fireman fizzles
 the guard gawks
 the waitress wilts
 the builder boards
 a fervor of the fittest

II. Glacier Saves A Trace

Ice-aged in experience
 a seething leader
 lifts up a stone
 of a future face: his thumbnails
 squashing sections of brain
 the result will reign
 duality widens in pain.

I GIVE YOU MY HEART.

 The crowd jostles for position.

YOUR COUNTRY HAS WON AGAIN.

 The crowd stampedes the celebration.

An assless professor,
 wavering on intensity's tight-rope,
 jumps to the ground
 and secures his constipation.

Hyena laughter cuts through the night.

NEANDERTHAL SNICKERS

a deathly haze still lingers
while some touched to the quick
aspire to redress:

the evolutionary eclipse,
the technical spasm,
the immigrated image,
the assassinated archetype

an isolated novice
peers through wisdom's window
yet secretly fears the bomb:
a bat screams loathing,
its spread wings
shadowing doom:

the existentialist reflects,
the magician performs,
an urchin urinates
a pathetic parody of essence,
a blind apeing of reality

senile in his settlement
a withered elder
embraces the flagpole,
its monumental fabric
flutters in his breath
flapping out the rhythm
of a time warped vigil

his sympathy becomes his burial shroud
the flagpole becomes his grave mark

(
C
the primal predecessor
who hurled the first stone,
who sharpened the first bone,
spelled havoc for a future realm:

Neanderthal snakes off
an ageless sleep,
flinches,
then peers through the century's
torn curtain:

"I've escaped an epoch," he gloats:
then grinning,
he resumes his somnolence
in a Paleolithic tomb.

III. RED FABLES AND DUDE CASES

REDMAN

The skies spill red
over a rotting teepee:
the child-man Tonto
smells a better life,
reluctantly reverses his role,
and like his newly acquired brethren,
he snides the sun
and embraces the milkless breasts of morality.

The horse streaking silver
cringes in slight, his sides slit
from the spurs of a restless mind.

Ranger murders the age's outcasts,
lynched and lonely in the guise of badmen:
backs to the barrel,
they fall-down-dead and decay honourably.
Ranger rides his magic carpet
in marriage with the law,
he ain't no bigot,
has a red-skinned brother
following the glitter in his shadow.
At night he dreams of the mayor's daughter
Juliana -- and oh yes, her sticky secretions.

The years farce forward,
Tonto becomes a man,
yelps another chase,
then slumps to the ground from trigger-right.
Friendship's quicksilver
shrinks in the distant race,
Kee-Mo-Saby suspects a minor loss.

Daggers startle
the ways of the lame,
dreams bomb the blunders
of conditioning's aim.
Glitter stalks the forest
cheesing for a mate,
Redman wheezes mucous,
a clump of carrion for fate.

Riding the back of revenge,
Tonto rips-off raw
the scalp of the Lone Ranger,
returns to his tribe,
rejoins his mate,
then dreams of being massacred
by games of the white.

HOMESTEAD HOLIDAY

The land surveyor pens a clever community.
Paper maps
create mishap:
we will settle the west with our best.

Tomahawk chokes
in a roamless reservation:
painted beads
in-terror decorate the burial grounds:
 feathers flake
 bisons smother.

The last leader
draws back his bow one more time.
The last arrow
sinks on fire;
smoke scowls.

Parched ponies
hobble through the smouldering bark
of a filched forest,
waiting for another birth
in another era, gameless.
Young hopes
flow fleeting through rapids
to rest in a delta of blood.
 Solace sperms
 in a teepee of rangled rum.

A belching grizzly
sneers through the slit
of a stumped redwood and observes
 this bashing of being
 this searing of sensitivity
 this lynching of life
then grimaces in the gratitude
of his consciousnessless evolution.
 Berries to the sun
 to be a bear.

A white colonist
justifies his ikons,
then with semen icicles
graces his wife's victorian gown.
 Now I'm set.
He loads his shotgun,
pulls up his pants
then aims at a duck-pin warrior.
Triggered in her tracks
the squaw falls dead.

HEADSKIN'S REVERIE

Reaching through the window of time
Head gathered an arrow
that once gathered the day:

...The slash of rain on worried wigwam --
the wail of coyotes,
the night rings like the Iroquois
whose last battle
drums in a dream,
whose last dance
feathers in a coup.

Displaced, defaced and blood,
a squaw,
like a river drowning,
tongues her palmed waters
before mourning her brave,
that butchered bandit,
thief of harmless hen,
purposing a petty morsel for a mother.

The rabbits, the reindeer and tribe
revere the dawn
with limbs stretched to the medicine sun,
then embark with stealth into nowness....

Processed wig on scalp,
Eaton's band on forehead,
Mazola on cheek,
the day, like all days,
findsHead catatonic and motionless,
like a famished rat
squirming in a trap
unable to crawl.

CLEFT CONVALESCENCE

Bitter herbs bellow paradox
on both sides of Cherry Lane.

The wizard wends his way
through the sweet and the sour,
the flower and prickle
make twitch the lip,
the riddle resolves
through complement.

As if dumped by duality
then infected with nescience,
middle-class Mack
shuns the day's other half,
now squawking spinsters of neglect.

Wallowing in the bosom of fun-land,
snagged in the trail
of the ferris wheel,
enamoured in awe
atop the cream-dream lady of champagne,
Mr. Mack follows docile
the mirror and the image
yet a stranger to the other's pulse.

If we kill the wizard
we become his joy: chance
may break him unaware.
There he dozes, cushioned by thorns,
a raven hued lady scrapes his back,
signalling genital play.
Our daggers dry, thirsting for flesh,
we, the foxes of cunning,
perceive only the slaughter.

His rendered lass yawns,
the left grabs her glance.
"Over there sated wizard,
assassins float the moat,
the daughter of slaughter surely is life:
feeling fine pumps with pain,
come let us stroll about Cherry Lane."

HERETIC DUDE

Incantations wither,
a fall of peter's leaves,
prayers pall like his beached epistles.

Syllabic dude of blasphemy
tongues humid Mary's
bereft breasts. The Dead Sea,
will it be found below?

Where were you
noble Joseph
when your lady's legs
parted a gap in history?
Did your lady crack
whilst you belaboured
with your testicles
like dead sea scrolls?

Whose ignorant babe
made for the slaughter of the innocents?
Whose child carved ikons
in the breeches of Nazareth
where itinerant nomen
walked away from life.

Riding hard, riding hump,
desecrations's camel
follows the star-fig
that drools over
the heat of humid harems
Mary and Mary galore.

Blessings to this dude,
our truest fathering.

WOKE UP WITH A CHRIST-ACHE

dog in a manger
straw streaks of sky
a load of gold steps off the storm
three idiots tiptoe with the stars
daring a pathway to babydom:
they whimper for innocence,
they cry for all mothers
and for the lovers that chase the sins ahead

numb in Nazareth
teenage Jesus
staggers from the market place
his head high-holy on hash:
he treks to his sea,
leans on his palm,
then cants to his dudes in awe:
this water is nothing
can't stop me
think I'll walk across the Galilee

later that day
on the wealthiest of waters
a formidable fisherman frowns:
what catch is this
eroded and neglected
this decay is nothing to me
he looks at the face
an ugly disgrace
then tosses the body overboard:
into the depths falls a lord

the night sky sparkles
dreams collide,
the fisherman picks up his pen:
 fiction in his head,
 a myth to be read
about some god who thought he was lighter than smoke

STRAYED BRAIN

The new age
empties its bowels.
Eruption's land-tanned runoff
fertilizes the pearled palace.
A gazelle licks the queen's crack
then streaks away
unobserved
into the dawn of puberty.
Her majesty blinks her lashes
then spreads a sigh.

The prince daydreams in smut
while the king proffers his passage.
The masses celebrate
a new air of wisdom:
the smack applause
of clapping buttocks
give hail to honour's horseman
who neighs
for the wild whore of yester-year.

Peasants pick their teeth
for the age of change.
A blue-eyed child
proclaims himself serf
and docile to its custom
smears his first locks with goat feces.

Order governs
the fenced-in universe
contemplates king's head.

STRETCHING THE LIMITS

for Hart Crane

a sheath of oil, a razor's descent,
you are loathsome to know
the shielded aches, annointed strifes
behind the armour flinching

but one from a multitude, the
coefficient consumed,
will slip into squalor
with lapping eyes,
lids snapping images
within the clenches of their blinks,
feasting the foul
that extends the body's gall
until the spectrum of rank and file
has clearly lost a meaning

you now ride the life
in sliding saddle
and up of miles:
you shift and swerve by,
the sun steadies streaking gripless reins,
the sky defines you space
for suppressed lament,
intensity's offerings
steer your blood into pressured flows,
the waves froth,
currents buck and you feel so alive

but an over-too-alive
can kill a complacency
until a curse strangles the fervor:
the switch stubborn on ceaseless,
pounding mounts the walls,
throbs hack the brain
pressed tightly
into the shrinking box

anything now to leave it
just to get out
 to be easy
 like you

the fading stern
cuts a final widening of water:
your eyes close gently
with the salted push

COSMIC FLU

after reading Alan Watts

The bulging bronze buttocks of the sun
squat skillfully
on the convergent lines of the spectrumed Nile.
A shallop sails in a yawn,
indifferent to the approach of dusk,
its Berber slinking into a jelloba,
away from the wrath of Sahara and her deciduous caprice:
the moon prepares
its push from obscurity, the sands
soon will singe like snow.

Arminna, Wadi Halfa, Dongola,
and around the bend they cluster,
a symphony of slimy-mouthed women,
lining the wharves of El Debba,
washing white their wares, like a flock of sheep
in spontaneous thirst.
A recent famine masticated most flesh,
the Casbah streets still deal in death,
odours linger like a liftless fog,
time to grasp, then move on.

Soon the desert will fade into fecundity,
that manless manipulator,
where game and ego
choke-flour-dry into meaninglessness.
The Berber, or is it Berger, looks his last glance back,
swirls of sand hold him in suspended trance,
the dunes and light equate into mirrors,
unbreakable, ubiquitous,
the shape always yours.

The Berber, who is Berger,
muses to himself: "Hmmm, in two weeks Khartoum,
then the flight to New York. This time I'm ready."

Not quite there,
satori came sudden in Shendi.
Flaunting his spine to fate
the stroke was true and light.
His bones now mingle with the desert of bones,
gameless, timeless and ready.

Back home, Brooklyn, the widow selfish
spits away a Watts from a salivaless mouth,
and with urinous curses
begins her new day in a Lilliputian travelogue.
"I'm ready," she abuses.

BIG CITY HAIKU

1.

A busy street,
doing and shopping,
a girl finds time to part her lips.

2.

Playing in the sand pit
a child shapes his castle:
a hoist lifts one ton of cement.

3.

Eyes implacable,
a confident walk;
at night she practices.

4.

Alone with her child:
a man on a park bench
reads a newspaper.

5.

Another spring has blossomed:
the old man smells a violet,
his grandson lights a cigarette.

6.

The target of eyes,
a sun tan in winter,
alone at night.

7.

A Blackie
unbuttons his shirt and is cool;
his wife scrubs floors for heat.

8.

Hurrying to be near
the company of friends;
the bacheleor enters the cinema.

9.

His mercedes honks to her hips;
he drives home
to his hand.

10.

The toilet flushes:
the sound of the Lewis
travelling through the pipes.

11.

I love, he throats to his wife of 7 years.
Across the street
a pair of breasts are bouncing.

12.

It's good to live in the big city;
a father gulps a glassful of gin,
the son lights his pipe of hashish.

13.

Along grassy boulevards
short skirts and young tanned thighs:
a neighbour conquers boredom.

14.

I would rather work
and be active, she professes:
the motherless, childless.

15.

Well there's no such thing
as a perfect city you know:
night time in another man's anal passage.

IV. MY RAGING HEAD

EVENING BRINGETH BILE

flinching in the night
that finds no end
for a squeaming, squirming mind
whose flames gravel infinity:
 endless lapping
 ceaseless churning
the frantic mind imploding,
delving,
where enigmas
become allness,
evanescent satori.

lapses into trivia:
 reshaping the past with perspective,
 clutching reality in reverie
wonderment smirks
at my restless corpse
groping for sleep-words as somnolence
between the hollow sounds
of the gone night

GANGLIA

Ring worm circles
the lass's back: newborn twins
snagged in the web
of time's trichinosis.
Ladders of transcendence
reek from rancid beer:
clouds coloured with utopian fluff
wallow in a haze of hemp
while thrill-pills
infiltrate dumb minds
that fall dead in euphoria.
Frail didactics
slink into poreless castles
wielding their argot of axe-quills
within the sanctities
of a metaphor.

Ass-man falls head first into the sand,
afraid to face his end.

The fire of the dragon
mutates into the sea.
Searing salt
livens the eye
while the masses smelt
into the solaces of iron.
Aorta pipelines
pump duty for nations.
Families unite
under the metallics of reason
though friction's fire
colours the dusk
and the night flares in feuds:
the age evolves into velvet dreams.

* * * *

A man's end faces me.
 There is a head framed on the wall,
 plugged in the flushes of guilt:
 the head stretches his veinless neck
 into arching anal passage
 then sucks himself dry
 in a creaming catharsis.

"aaaaeeeiooooouuu"

* * * *

I fled to the farthest mountain,
 its snows snuffed my scent.

Swam to a mapless island,
 drowned in the white man's abuse.

Scissored the wires of fortune,
 hung by the judge of the sky.

Split for the fantasy of my flat,
 smothered by a platoon of loneliness.

Snuggled between the breasts of my woman,
 made sleep psychotic lids:
 then eyed we jumped
 into the sunset of a picture frame,
 naked with sparrows
 breathing of head,
 songs of schizoids
 foment near a pond.

RESTAURANT DILEMMA

Creamed cartilage
 marrows my soup.
 Kayak fantasies
 flow freely around a bend of meat:
 we play the rapids,
 we sing the falls.
 Jutting cliffs of potato
 stagger upwards,
 heavy ascensions of Himalaya.
 Spoon-spun undercurrents
 circle in suction:
 the gravy phlegms
 baring the gorge,
 I hinge on the being of swallow.

Can't have that.
 Don't dig the intestinal track.

Cringing clatter
 whips wide my eyes.
 The restaurant frolics
 with dancing pepper balls
 while violins weep rhapsodies of a humid night,
 cossack whores, thighs untight
 buttocking
 to the nostalgia
 of pop-tune Pasha and the Hunyuk homeland.

Vomiting preceded a casual exit.

My pancreas heaves stone.
The rage to break
from the battered past:
burrowed my being
into a nook in the alley-way
to celebrate the sky
with my brethren bums:
laid my head on a pillow of ash,
then dreamed of the tribe
and its splendid secretions.

WOKE UP WITH PALSY

A jasmine-skinned Jew
wrote the prelude:
a cunning Christian
played his part.

What did Noah really know?
Wood and water: the mating habits
of oily beasts?

Your age has grown senile.
A cornstalk under goes metamorphosis
and awakens a visionary.
A lonesome lunatic
punctures his lung with pointed pen,
his manuscript of matter
dies in era's black fantasies
though one image wriggles free
under the spell
of clarity.

head poet
slides into a telephone booth
adjacent to a wax museum,
smashes his spectacles
dons his suit of inferiority
ties-up his complexes
then flies to a pulpit of lava
and presents his trade
like a dancer without steps
like a fart without its ass

Truth gutters
in the spaces of parentheses.
The poet and politician
make repulsive love
near a collection
of "the new" psychology.

Rob Lewis, the shackled mite of his time,
crawls into a grave of dusty poems,
lights a match,
then laughs his ashes off.

CAGED

Sleeping, the room
abounding in boas,
clowns poised in adoration,
the solicitors snapped
the grip of this dream,
then swayed me to the pragmatist's pit
where a coal-robed judge
with the rage of an ice age,
reeking in the colours of his commands,
bewails his last night,
and in a fit of feigned delight
his left pocket proffers
a coiling anaconda
to the soft scented neck
of his immaculate mother.

Caged in a court room
pallid precepts emanate,
while justice, trained to be stainless,
frisks fetishly
the zooed in audience
where a pair of burning breasts
elicit the verdict
of swelling sin.
The judge jowls:
 off with these nipples of treason,
 that rob man of his reason.

The pit's rancidity
continues to infiltrate
the anticipation of cities.
The judge sneers
as a conqueror over a heap of death,
fully successful in fetid projection.
They now speak of the sun
as an ancient myth: a tale
before lucidity.

Unable to crack the circle's grip
I seized the last string
of the vanishing dream
then tied myself
into its bliss.

V. HEAD'S END

PULL OF LIFE

under an unchanging solar eye
irony's executioner
conspires with deception

without reprieve
the absurd permeates the road of reason
that treks to decapitate at the guillotine
whose blade knows no respite
before the endless line-up
of the monotonous masses
in fear to reflect themselves
in a handful of dirt

irony's belly
impregnates with paradox:
the pull of life
yanks at reason that cracks from the strain
where amorously arises the absurd,
like the genie who smote
the mathematician
before having writ
his equation for death

on a broken lantern
a streetman watches his breath
form like the dew of dawn,
then licks it away
with the moment

A NEW DOOM

deflated soufflés
pester me doom, cuisines for the visionary:
 hot mommas of magnesia,
 masters of the night time,
 wet their labia one last time,
 elixirs for flaccid life lines:
music behind bars
amplifies feelingless faces
as sordid scales
cling to the flow
of demoted dinosaurs,
damp and dreary in a slew of makeshift fodder,
but no bother!
 a collaborating bridge
 cushions a bus,
 opens the valve,
 barfs and sucks,
 an oiling for the joints of lifelessness:
sex dollies puff nipples
from hawk-red balconies:
patches of panty
maneuver in the moonlight
while a ninety year old poet
chases the last damp clit
that eagers escape
into the folded sheets of memories
of wet days gone by:

nowness scourges his sockets
with insemination factories
that blossom ballless babies:
 gurus ringworm from cosmic pews,
 a concert of lobes
 fiddle with their data,
Yeat's Second Coming
hangs limpid from a juiceless sac

beneath the catatonic shadows
of a spider ravaged acacia,
a moment of mutation,
with artesian radiance
stridently yawns himself awake:
restless after centuries of slumber
he broods for some change and action

a cobra pauses beneath the dusty starred sky,
maybe his wait in line has ended

he flowers his fangs to the praises of blackness

EPOCH SCHIZOPHRENIA

raging restlessness:

lost and limpid in the chasm
of epoch schizophrenia:

Neolithic body
revels in the guts of the hunt
while the body's soaring mind
masters the mire of implosion
in a world that is shrinking
inside the consciousness of wires

awake to the warp:

an antelope bone
prefaces the one hand,
Fortran fingers the other:
evolution jostles out of joint,
the landscape slits at my neck

leading electrons
mingle with their clan,
even the legless
are mesmerized by the part,
they contribute cunningless to the flow

alone in the locks of insight,
while dying deathlessly
before the stare of destiny
the child-man whimpers
between being and helplessness

bucked by the proof of a process,
deafened by the drone of entropy,
the cells of life
shake in their format
awaiting the onslaught of the new condition

along the frontiers of this new era
where the edge of the earth
dangers with darkness

dodos are preparing for dominance
a glacier awakens to its sun-spots

men are rusting painlessly

TIME WARP

The grass lands whistle
 tumble-weed allegories. Scarecrows
 claim as theirs the earth, shirting forth
 flags of flannel.
 Straw for supper, breath for dessert,
 the day excretes night,
 night excretes day,
 while we, the witness absurd,
 observe the vigil
 of time-warped transpirations.

A Bombayan turban
 engages a hairless head,
 shoulders etching shape
 to a coal-coloured cape,
 effusions of an alien life-style.

What is this shape
 that struts before us?
 A prophet of Saturn,
 some son of a sun?

Thalamus mumblings, met in high gear,
 now sputter volitionless:
 language wavers like weightless flagella,
 suede lips welt like a downless zipper,
 cedar dust drops from a mouth.

Are these the silences of a time-warped era?

Hark, look yonder,
 vernal pastures munch the cud.

O Savannah, you rustle with grassy sighs,
 tropical limbs emptied of moonlight
 leaving the gap agape, where flutter
 effulgent gasps of requiem.

Burrowing to the sun for the very first time
a mole is instantly blinded by the light.

We live in an epoch of fragments.
The tribes scattered savage,
ravaged instinctless,
man strays after street lamps
to commune with his shadows --
Jim Bowie jackknife
to cut away the loneliness,
carve a factless friend,
slash a time-warped mind.

Hope prepares for the bell,
a punch for posterity,
a dive for peace, cutless, bashless,
the slap-happy present
seeks refuge in fragments:
wear your gloves well boy,
an ikon for your efforts,
a leaflet in defeat.

Voices invade the canyon,
sounds rebound and speak less rhetoric.
The warp suffocates. Man scrawls desperate
into solaces of the past: recoiling.

The Pharoah flouts soundless. Cheops
tries to remember himself. Pyramids
sit stoned for centuries, their mummies
reroll then slumber into Lethe.

Chants hymn to the invisible savior,
the wind returns a mock retort:

Arizona blindness,
sand smudged eyes

that shed the slender sunlight
to a greenless cliff
where warps a bouldering meat of earth,
fragmented, precarious,
a ponderant premonition of a destiny dangling.

A mind beyond its time
melts messageless
into the blisses of cooling quicksand.