The Headless Centaurs:
their voyage and conquest — by Hugh Fox
An Introduction of Sorts ...

Europe at the end of the Middle Ages was a closed shell. One God, one language, one religion, one social system. But outside the frontiers of Europe there always hummed an aura of the fabulous. The Alexander legends, the works of Marco Polo, the works of the ancient poets like Virgil maintained a spark of the "romantic," the "incredible."

Then the New World, America, was discovered. At first they believed it was under the control of the devil and the explorations were a combination of mercantilistic curiosity and religious crusade. Europe split wide open. The New World (or worlds because, after all, we're talking of Africa and the Far East as well) changed every neat concept in the European consciousness. In South America, especially, the Spaniards were confounded. These were barbarians, these people ... so ran the story. They were infidels, devil worshippers. And the Spaniards were Crusaders, bringers of Christ to the heathen. They really saw themselves that way.

From the beginning, though, it was not merely an encounter between Christ and Devil, but between Technology and non-Technology, between an industrializing and a non-industrial culture, between the Indians who lived in a myth-centered world and the Spaniards who lived half in myth and half in greed. The early Aztec codices make the Spanish out to be gods -- saw them and their horses as centaurs.

Christ, in this context, becomes a battle, a war god -- conquest means not only destruction and pillage, but the annihilation of all traces of the former Indian gods. The early chroniclers describe in great detail the customs of the Aztecs and Incas and Mayas. Within a decade there was nothing left to describe. Today, going through the ruins, through Monte Alban, Palenque, Chichan Itza, Pisco, Cuzco, Chan-Chan, from Mexico all the way to Lake Titicaca in Bolivia, you can only marvel at what the Spaniards must have destroyed. A great deal has been written recently on the mystiques of the Aztecs and Incas, and what emerges are cultures dominated by "spirit," by worship, by a genuine other-worldliness, a permeability between "this" and the "other" world.

Once the Spaniards had conquered the Indians, they began to quarrel among themselves and civil wars broke out. The influx of gold into Spain caused a fatal inflation and by the seventeenth century Spain itself was an empty desert. In both North and South America, though, the Indians were destroyed -- in South America physically by making them semi-slaves on farms and in mines, in North America by relegating them to reservations, mis-translating their names, mis-representing their ideals.

In North America in the nineteenth century the Ghost-Dance religion began, led by an Indian named Wovoka. He believed that by dancing a certain magical dance wearing magical shirts that the old days could be revived. However, those
who thought that the ghost-dance shirts were impervious to bullets soon found out that magic didn't work against steel and the ghost-dance religion became a children's game.

Now in South America the Indian is still outside of the "civilization." It is difficult to say how many Indians in Bolivia and Peru don't speak Spanish, but it is often said that 70% of the population of Bolivia and Peru speak Aymara and Quechua. In Ecuador, Chile, Columbia, the Indian is still stepped on, semi-enslaved. In the U.S. he is outside the fringe of society, "subsidized" by the U.S. government, still exploited and/or ignored.

That is what Western Man did to the Non-Western World in America. He did or is trying to do the same to the Non-Western World in the Far East, the Middle-East, Africa, wherever he can.

* * *

About the title. From a conversation I had one night with Dukardo Hinestrosa, the Columbian Nadaista. He invented the collection title for Ediciones de la Frontera: Pez sin Escamas (Scaleless Fish). The Centaurs, of course, in the early CODICES are the Spanish on horses. The Aztecs depict man and horse as one animal. The Headless part I took as a symbolic meaning to refer to the fact that until the Spanish began the conquest of the New World (after the expulsion of the Moors, which significantly ended in 1492) they were "headless" in the sense that they had no more purpose. The New World conquest gave them purpose again. The Spanish historian Americo Castro and others, for example, see the conquest of America as an extension of the reconquest of Spain.

-- July 23, 1968, Providence, Rhode Island

THERE IS NOTHING NEW ABOUT WHAT WE ARE DOING IN VIET NAM. IT'S THE SAME THING WE DID TO THE AMERICAN INDIAN, THE SAME THING THAT THE SPANISH DID TO THE INCAS, AZTECS AND MAYAS -- THE SAME THING THAT ALL THE OCCIDENT HAS DONE TO ALL THE NON-OCCIDENTAL WORLD.
Collochio
god-devil speaketh unto them, sometimes in the likeness of a black dog, sometimes in the likeness of a black calf

(NOT AS WHITE AS ALBION the sea-gull island spreading its fragrant wings across innocuous seas, overshadowing, shadowing over unfragrant peoples):

THE BUILDING OF FRIARIES AND NUNNERIES AND CHAPELS GOETH WONDERFULLY FORWARD.

Ophir is as ophir does, fills the need to un-now

In my time, the woods were full of slide (brass) telescope into owls and beggars some possible, possible, possible although improbable, previously-proved-impossible howling talons and empty eye-sockets to-come and the owls always won.
Now you see it, now you ("On a good day you can hear the water filling from the river which went out of Eden to water the Garden)
don't.

Mind-eye man
sniffing un-reality
abstractly
projects
paradiso terrestre to the North-East
and "our antipodes" to the South-West,
Paradise roared round with fire,
reaching up to the sky,
inviting hand to see,
eye to turn,
burn,
brake,
through and through and through
persistance
out of reach,
in reach and
he'll (generic) ignore it.

3.
The Lord of the Elephants
(gold, silver, pearles -- and precious stones)
snorts at the feathered dawn
(from) behind his (to him) invisible fire-wall,
waiting without knowing he is waiting, in his
known-unknown world
to be discovered -- and destroyed.

Talking to the devil (god),
never eating off the same
dishes twice,
never wearing the same clothes
twice:
the sun sweats, weeps,
vomits gold
and the aviaries scream
with the idolatry of
such opulence.

the barbarians are,
these are
the barbarians
are
still on the other side of the wall.

4.

Only the silver-gold wheels turn.
The titles come first, the spoor before the slaughter,
gold plants, corn fields with silver stalks, gold ears, gold rabbits, mice, snakes, lizards, butterflies, gold birds in gold trees, lions, tigers, gold and silver baths with gold and silver pipes, water is innocent that doesn't know the hand that touches it, air through the trees, rain.
The value of a thing is in its itness, itself, what it is, what it is in itself ....

Don Diego Dado ha dado dados a ....

On the seventh day of the seventh year, this seventh son of a seventh son, hearing seven peacocks scream above the snorting of his swine, carefully balances his severed head on its bloody stalk, evokes the name of Santiago seven times, and the break is healed.

Que sui-je?
Je suis l'âme errante.

5.

The four stars of the Southern Cross held up against the
("Boanerges, filii tonitrui.") in(un)fidel(faithful),

faith in the orthodoxy of Paradise,

pearls around his neck

strings of love-trysts

as I lay me down to dust

and

drowned in the

sound of

diving water.

Vidi quattro stelle

non viste mai furo ch'alla prima gente,

anihilating the

self-shell (sin) able-unable

(lo que Dios quiera)
to say

Here,

Now,

without the (pre) conditions

d of Allah

and some crusade.

Don Diego feels the wind, and the stars become,

not a cross, but a

mandolin,

but he thinks
cross, splits down through his Manichee center,

And wind becomes merely the leaven of the great dough sails.

6.

Trapalanda,

night now

and the moon rises in slow motion,

negative fuchsia riders on negative fuchsia horses

flow

through the up-to-the-horses-
knees

hairgrass,

water-arcs

falling, the bounce, swing

(slow motion)

stride of

out-of (after)
time.
Negative magenta now, the invaders
come on the back of thunder, four footed
spitting fire,
Don Diego opens his mouth, a thousand natives die,
when he blinks Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl
fall like flaming arrows,
the grasslands dry, begin to burn,
far away, on the other side of the mountains,
the Lord of the Elephants,
over the sounds of birds and flowing water,
hears the first wails of terror begin to rise.
Nor do these tears mean the coming of rain,
this blood nourish the re-coming of the sun.

7.

The sun never sets,
the corn withers,
the grass dies,
the dustspots spread,
the Lord of the Elephants encircles Don Diego and the other centaurs
with winds,
dust walls whirling round them in the mountains as they move inland,
only their dogs bark, break the windwalls, and he calls up fire,
speaks and the sky is filled with fire-lances that the centaurs meet with firetongues spit out of their own mouths.

Rabbits, owls, wild boars and the agate-eyed puma,
the Lord of the Elephants' flesh melts, dissolves,
and he spreads out like an outstretched hand,
moving between the multiple death-life worlds.
I dress myself in the skin of my victim because the world is being born again,
my victim touches the face of the gods, he moves up, forever to live with them.

The Now dissolving dissolves the dry grass and the earth, tempers the burning sun,
the wind gods carry me aloft, and now, immune, I burn the sun, the sun no longer burns me.
The Time of the Ocelot begins
We shall be slaughtered in battle,

the best among us shall be taken captive,

we shall be sold into slavery,

the sky rains knives and serpents,

the rivers swell with pestilence, my people are covered with sores,

my temples fall, my images are broken and trampled,

my tongues fall silent, my gods fall from their skies

the rains stop the winds die

Señora nuestra Chalchiuhtlicue y Chalchiuhtlatonac, fill the hearts of thy faithful with thy love.

9.

Odin, Thor, Frey roar blood, the cycle is complete.

Thorvald pulls the arrows from his armpit and Tici-Viracocha

WHOEVER CALLS UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND DO NOT FORGET ALL HE HATH DONE FOR THEE

YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, MEMBER FOR MEMBER


THE LORD IS THE PORTION OF MY INHERITANCE

IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED

WHOEVER CALLS UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND DO NOT FORGET ALL HE HATH DONE FOR THEE

YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, MEMBER FOR MEMBER


THE LORD IS THE PORTION OF MY INHERITANCE

IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED
splits, explodes, fragments, and the sky begins to bleed. John Hawkins, the rat-eater, arises from his tomb in Cornwall, skeletal hand reaching out, seeking land that his eyeless eye sockets cannot hope to see, and all the statues of our dead ancestors melt and soak (disappearing) into the ground, the magenta-colored skies open and vomit down Humphrey Gilbert, sword in hand, naming the mountains of the moon Albion, as the burial mounds break open and the dust of the dead is carried aloft in a dull, brown cloud.

I claim
I claim this land for this land
I clamor for

the establishment of the
NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM
I
EYE everywhere but not a drop to drink.

10.

The centaurs run round the high towers, circle the walls, gain strength as their hooves touch the earth, only the antipodes, linked with ligaments to the skies, are uncertain about the efficacy of their arms, so that, even when they make resistance, it is always with a spirit-arm strapped behind their backs. Hell against heaven hounds, and even the antipodes believe in the divinity of the centaurs.

In Guernica I come to see
The sacred oak that waits for me.

Don Diego Dado came to the town
Don Diego Dado blew the walls down,
Long daggers, short swords, crossbowmen, harsh words, and (as the black vultures come screaming down the day darkens, the earth splits, the sky fills with screams and the smell of burning flesh)

the extra push of valor (stout wink) that pulls a true believer through.

11.

Quetzalcoatl-Tici-Viracocha sallies forth on the sunplain, brandishing his war-axe and God the Father, lightning streaming from his palms, raises his hands and Quetzalcoatl-Tici-Viracocha is stunned, stumbles to the cloud edges and falls, down, in midfall extends his arms which flower plumes and arising he claps his wings as the Spiritu Sanctus, black-bat winged, its beak stained with blood, swoops down to meet him, and when they touch the skies explode, the clouds burn like dry grass and Christ the Musketmaker takes aim, but as Tepeyolohtli roars the musket shatters and Christ, raising up his punctured hands, drowns the world in his blood. Santiago, patron of Cannons, orare pro nobis, Arbitrator of Arquebuses, orare pro nobis, Master of the Crossbow, orare pro nobis.
Forger of swords,  
Pickaxes and  
Iron bars,  

Why pursue this war?  

I am sorry to  
have destroyed  
your cities  
and burned  
your people  
orare pro nobis.  
orare pro nobis.  

But I cannot, will not, leave; and even if I leave,  
or even if you kill me, I will be replaced and the  
conquest will be accomplished, because the destiny  
of the world is that  
geometry shall  
destroy magic.  

12.

Bodies the color of ripe corn,  
bodies as white as  
cornstalk buds,  
the buds of the maguey,  
beheaded bodies,  
armless bodies,  
legless bodies,  
bodies mutilated and torn.  

The ideas remain intact,  
the rectangularity of the  
chessboard remains  
unchanged,  
the outline of the  
castle, knight, bishop,  
pawn,  
move forward through  
time,  
but the bodies are  
heaped, buried, burned.  

13.

The ransom-eyed King of the Elephants,  
held captive in the blue tower overlooking  
the forty-fifth curve of the green lagoon,  
is taught  
to  
play  
chess.
the interlude of memory, 
foam sandals and gold 
rattles, 
ocelot skin 
bound on her 
calf and 
water lilies on 
her shield, which she 
 twirls above 
her head in 
circles, the songs and 
dances of Tecuilhuitontl 
were of love and 
sweet stories, they unbound 
their hair which 
covered them like 
cloaks, the goddess 
of the young corn, 
about to die, with 
a gold disk on a gold 
chain around her 
neck and wearing 
carmine-colored 
sandals 
Possessed (I am). 
Christus Rey 
Comes 
The Last Judgement, 
But not for me, 
For me, but not 
aloft, the bellows blow, the 
cauldron of the damned. 
Why are the faces so placid? 
Why is there a need for a 
hell after this life 
here? 
The sun on my back I move through the metamorphoses of 
wind to become 
raven, 
jaguar, 
winged lion
and feathered serpent.

Held by iron chains I watch gold
masks
shields
goblets
brooches
earrings
necklaces
become rapiers and cinquedas, culverins, falconets, pikes, blunderbusses, cutlasses, Derringers, pepperboxes, carbines, mortars, Gatlings, Colt-Browning, howitzers, torpedos, and slowly soar up
F-101 B's, F-105's, Thunderchiefs, F-8 Crusaders, Convair F-106's, F-104 Starfighters, YF-12A's
Furies

Demons

Skyrays

Mercury-Atlas D's,

only the earth that Mercury invents and Atlas sustains, spinning sleekly hermetic and unplummed, without the respiration of jade mosaic masks nor the hope-fear composite of jaguars and plume-head-dressed fire-gods, is faceless, mute, profane.

As the rooms fill with ransom the ghost-dance stops and the four sacred directions of the wind and universe become the bearings of a compass.

15.

The sun on my back I look through the palm of my hand and read the signs, gold by weight instead of beauty, beauty hung for being beautiful, winds of locusts, all the forms and symbols metamorphized or destroyed ("ahorcaron a dos indias, una doncella y la otra recién casada ... porque eran muy hermosas....")
drowning, the cutting off of breasts, noses, whatever part or organ that can be cut, mutilated, whatever variation of mutilation possible, all the possibilities of variation, the variations of possibilities, performed, excused --
WE ARE FEW
THEY ARE MANY....
MILITARY EXPEDIENCY.
NEED.

I look through my palm
and see myself weighed, measured,
melted down, and Agnus deified,
and as cuts rain down like raven beaks,
biting, gouging into my cheeks, my shoulders, chest, eyes,
I rise.
the world red through the lens of my own blood,
and make my own obsidian do to down me.

16.

They would have

les masques
gold labrets

worn, broken

bas-relief en stuc,
jade plaques,

down, time
would have

les têtes en pierre
sculptées,
carved metates,

sucked them
all

les crânes en cristal
de roche, polychrome
incensarios

down its maw,
The Eagles of the East
would have killed the
Jaguars of the West,
the Serpents of the
North would have killed
the Ocelots of the South,

But
they would have been
themselves,
all within
the compass of
their
their-ness.

- 21 -
Earth is, can not be, real, either everything has been in vain, or there is some other life in-to night, over the edge of night

in the late dust wind sun of afternoon

fading

flow-ers flowing, stripped in the wind,

over the edge of day

some other place in-to day.

17.

After conquest, civil war, the blood still boiling after the fire is out, the cannon-roar still echoing after the ball has struck, the sky still dead after the volcano has receded back into the ground.
Christ digests Viracocha, 
the cat-god becomes 
man, 
the infinite welded to the finite, 
man no longer welded to the (cat, snake, bird, monkey, buffalo) world. 

Centaur against centaur now, 

Mass, 
Cross, 
Crusade, 

and the eyes of the hills around the arena, 
watch, 
wonder, 
why did they, these god-monsters, 
why do they rumble across the rubble of our ruined world. 

"For a long time we have wished to see you and hear the words that will give us understanding."

The corps of Arqubusiers advances, 

Don Diego Dado's left eye out, 

bullets linked together by an iron chain, 

right leg, gone, 

(Saint Lazarus, come forth from the tomb before the fifth day, before your flesh is too far eaten by worms.) 

The bar of his visor gone, ball against his forehead, 
the five wounds of Christ and now a sixth, his reason, gone, 
he falls, 
sprawls out across the maize-dust 
and Don Fernando Scorpio, 
both from Extremadura, swineherds both (all) raises his lance 
(Saint Lazarus, bury us in the walls of your sepulchur, and save us from putrefaction) 
and buries it in Don Diego's heart, 
then with a sweep of his sword, as if he were opening a huge and heavy book, 
he beheads him, places his head on a pike and declares himself victorious (over inertia). 

18. 
Purgation 
Purification, 
the dust of defeat settles, 
the heads all gone,
the hands like blind eyes feel along the sun-warmed walls for cracks and crevices.

How to make wax, wax candles, lighted in front of the holy altars and crosses,

You stop human sacrifices by sacrificing humans.

Chief Big Foot (defeat them with Vaudeville names) dies, struggling to rise, frozen struggling, his last gesture effort his last effort defeated, but caught in the gesture of struggle, his will as long as he had will willing against them, their death, their cold, their conversion, his will his only reality, as long as his reality stayed real.

One way to win.

The old men are dead, the leaders of the young, winter comes and we have no blankets, the children are freezing, those who escaped to the hills have no blankets or food ....

Dead, among the dead, life among the dead, seek life, my life, my living, the living that made my life, among the dead.

19.

But even then, out of the stone crypt of acculturation, the old ways, tortured, twisted, grotesque, not only survive, persist, but thrive.
Wovoka:

"The sun died, I arrived up

(The Arapahos sing: "Father have pity on me, I have nothing to eat, I am dying of thirst -- everything is gone.")

in the place of UNCHANGE REGENERATION, the world will come again, dance Arapahos and Cheyennes, Bannocks and Shoshones, Utes and Paiutes, hasten the day, push time into time-less-ness, float, impervious to bullets and annuities, over the hills and the long grass, blown by the winds (Father, my father ....)

the world will come again as it was."

Only when it didn't come? The ghost-dance (Dance my people!) became a children's game, became a children's game, but hums, still hums, still will be renewed, the old ways persist, transformed.

20.

Only how can the ritual fire be maintained in the mine tied by the unseen time of sunup to sundown the life round, starting from and curving back to blindness.

the capsule around me changes, grows notches, begins to tick and clang,
grows rails, wheels,
wheezes,
sneezes,
expands.

I stare at the backs of my hands,
listen to my voice,
feel my feet on rock and dust,
reach out --
but the capsule of my world
expands faster than my mind
can run.
I listen for winds, grass
and the turning of the world,
water,
the hooves of day,
the screech of night,
but my mine-world
is impenetrable
and even when I emerge
I carry the skins of other
worlds around me.

What is new in the
whirlwind of conquest,
about death
emanating from the core of
a sanitized smile?

21.

The photographs are yellow,
feather, fringe, moccasin
and bead,
worn on other bodies
around other faces,
an ironic commentary on
vanished threats.

Heart safe behind yellow
photographs,
the eagle-bone war whistle
trapped mute on yellowed pages.

Safe, the treaties stand
broken, set, rebroken
now
and
now
and
now
into receding future now's of
spiralling significance.
The roof expands.
I rise up,
the center of the maize plant spreads
green across the sky.
out from its center a cloud comes,
I move across the center of the world,
the cloud and I move fast,
below the tribes gather,
the separate tribes,
the tribes that never
gathered before gather,
as the clouds close
in around them the
tribes gather in one
tribe.

My brothers of all the tribes,
rise to meet me,
swirl rising around me,
swirl around me,
rise,
and we merge,
the lines between us dissolve ...

as the vision fades
and the snow-wind outside circles
around the walls of my winter
as I sit in the middle of the floor in
the darkness, fold my arms and wait.

22.

The potlatch squeaks,
and the new (sanitary)
privy still
stinks

"Some kind of
dance doll"
lies in the
corner

(Shoot my way out? With what? No more. Not even the idea.)

We bake bread
in ovens and
death is life,
cyclic,
regeneration,
renewal,
we are clouds,
rain,
and the leaking faucet
hardly penetrates the
mantle of our minds.

SUN-FATHER
EARTH-MOTHER
FIRE-GRANDMOTHER
WATER-GRANDFATHER
CORN-BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS

In winter the planes drop hay and food
(when they come)
and in summer the
wind whips up the
dust dry
around the ankles of
our poverty.
We don't move toward,
our us
is preferable to the
handouts of hate
disguised as destiny.

Per Capita
Failure
Official
Distrust
Indian Bureau
The Vacuum of
Bureaucracy

It is estimated that
acculturation
Tracoma,
acculturation
Tracoma,
acculturation
Tuberculosis,
augment,
although
Other,

the old
forms still
retain their
The white man's path
forms
(hollow)
Over the steel cliff
Into the
Mouth of oblivion.
Poor man in a white land,
broken hand,
handout,
you see what happens
if you sit it out
quietly,
you see what
happens if you roar,
fight back,
you see what
happens, poor man
in a white land,
you see.

-- Hugh Fox
Lima-Los Angeles, 1968

Translation Notes:

Page 12, Lines 41-2: "What am I? I am the wandering spirit."
P. 13, L. 1-2: "Boanerges, sons of thunder."
P. 13, L. 14-5: "I saw four stars never seen before except by the first people."
P. 13, L. 18: "What God wills."
P. 20, L. 39-40: "They hung two Indians, a virgin and another one, recently married ... because they were very beautiful ...."