

# *New and Selected Poems*

## Also by Fred Beake:

### *as poet*

Ten Songs for Spring (1970)

Grey Songs (1973)

Asides for Quintus: Poems and Translations (1974)

Legends from Mammon: Poems and Translations 1974-1976

The Castle: Poems and Translations 1976-80

Dark Flight: Selected Poems and Translations 1980-82

The Fisher Queen (1988)

The Whiteness of Her Becoming: Poems 1966-91

Towards the West and other poems (1995)

Places and Elegies: Poems and Translations 1992-7

The Broad Waters of the North Atlantic (Etruscan Reader IX)

The Cyclops: Poems, Translations, Essay (2002)

### *as critic*

The Imaginations of Mr Shelley (1993)

### *as translator*

Peace by Aristophanes (1998)

The Night of Loveless Nights by Robert Desnos (1974)

The Bees of the Horizon (2005)

### *as editor*

A Mingling of Streams:

Anthology of Poems selected from The Poet's Voice vols 1-9 (1989)

The Collected Later Poems of Edward Boaden Thomas (1993)

**FRED BEAKE**

**New and Selected Poems**

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## CONTENTS

### I. Poems 1969-99

#### *Odes*

To Dance the Sky	9
Laura and the Fwower	10
Down a Byway	11
Stone Circles: Stanton Drew	12
Mutations	13
Clarity and Sanity	14
This Land Sours All	15
On a Winter's Day	16
Evening-still the light	17
Up on the Fells of Yesteryear	18
With my Mother at Brown's Folly	19
It was on a Day of White Frost	20
Signs	21
For my Brother at a Dark Time	22
Burnham Beeches	23
The Light	24
Ode for an English Millennium	25
Black	27
Dark View	28

#### *Fictions*

Methuselah and the Parson	29
Sir Philip in Heaven	30
Artorius Dux Bellorum	33
Seth Hurley, Old	35
The General	37
Clarissa Harrison	39
Mrs James	41
The Job	43

#### *Symphonies*

Oracle to Pilgrim	46
Asides from Hell	49

Love Songs	51
Symphony One	54
Symphony Two	56
Symphony Three	58
Elegy at the Beginning of Spring	61
The Island	63
Towards the West	67

### ***Conversations***

Letter to Charles Hobday	88
At Towyn	90

## **2.New Poems 2003-2005**

Marona	92
Elegy	116
A Horatian Ode	117
When the Great Armada Came	119
The Invaders	120
Pa and the Woman of Good Family	121
Guinevere and Lancelot	122
A Peak in Darien	124
The Heretic	127
The Prophecy	128
The Dragon Smith	129
At Berry Head	130
For Charles	131
The Tune	132
The Track	133
The Stream	134
Hylas	135
The Horn	136
My Love's Walk on Walls Hill	138
Zeus	139
By The Wharfe Towards Sicklinghall	140
The Cove	141
At Wells Cathedral	142
<i>For My Mother</i>	143

*To the memory of*

Fred Hill (1881-1964)

Jean W. Beake, née Hill (1918-2002)

Frank J. C. Beake (1915-1977)

Charles H. Hobday (1917-2005)





## **The Invaders**

Descending to the kitchen in the middle of the night  
    She found a slug on the dishcloth, and a slug on the floor  
– Curiously between turds and jewels to the sight,  
    Conglomerate of green with something darker.

She wrapped up the invaders in paper napkins,  
    And a bag of the latest plastic,  
For she did not want to kill them off for making expeditions  
    That originated in the nature of their beings.

At the back of her head came pictures of ancient serpents  
    Lurking in mud-floored underworlds,  
Able to creep into the architecture of our modern places,  
    And subvert what is well-made and of this period

Into visions uncomfortable and slippery,  
    Lurking in corners unseen,  
Waiting for the unwary to put down a foot,  
    And endure the ancient infection.

## **Pa and the Woman of Good Family**

Her petticoat rustles, she carries a sketchbook,  
And she is looking for a subject.  
She spots this interesting eight year old from the lower classes

And offers half a crown, just to sit on a fallen tree  
Over the stream. Half a crown!  
Meat for next week to his Ma

Skimping by on bread and milk  
In a different world to this siren  
Who sketched and sketched all that afternoon

Constantly telling him not to move.  
And Pa sat, getting stiffer and stiffer  
– But dead keen on that half crown.

And she finishes, and tosses the coin to her collaborator,  
And walks away with a rustle of skirts  
– Eager to show off her sketch to those at home

Perhaps even to a future husband,  
Thinking that well worth half a crown  
– And such a nice little boy!

No doubt she did not choose to see him fall in the water:  
if she had attempted to be brave and fish him out  
Her pretty skirts might have pulled her under.

## Guenevere and Lancelot

"There is mud beneath the great beech now it is autumn,  
which makes our game too obvious, and anyway I do not like  
to wreck too many gowns, and even Arthur  
asks questions, if still light-heartedly,  
about my desire to watch every bird in the palace wood.

I cannot have you in my chamber.  
There is enough gossip to arrest me. A more jealous man  
or one less wrapt in the good of his country  
would already have taken notice, but later or sooner  
his enemies, who know I am a bulwark to him,  
whatever my feelings for you, will waken him to his injury,  
which will lead inevitably  
to death by the lion of judicial fire. No doubt there will be many  
songs

about the queen who spoke fairly to her lord  
while she wiled away her time in adultery;  
but I would rather live to love you, as long as I am able  
and give my lord the wily council of a woman, which is cannier  
than the tempestuous blunderings of councillors.  
But this does not mean I do not wish to see you.

There is a tourney at the castle of the Five Pines  
on the Hill of the Four Winds, and Sir Mark its castellan  
understands such things as are between us two,  
and was a page at the court of my father, and he would be glad  
to have the true Queen as his tournament's monarch."

"I could escort you, and perhaps perform" said Lancelot  
suddenly aware he was out of practice with his lance.

So Guenevere said one day to her lord, King Arthur

"Sir Mark of Five Pines on the Hill of Four Winds  
requests me to be queen of his tourney. I would gladly  
ask you to come with me, but you are busy.

The Ambassadors of the Princes of Ireland take all your time.

Adjudicating the boundaries of Ireland could take a thousand  
years!

And the Prince of Brittany will be with us soon, and only you  
can entertain him. I will ask Lancelot to escort me.  
He is not much of a man for politics. He is good company,  
and I am sure would like to participate.'

But King Arthur answered "The ambassadors of the Princes of  
Ireland

do not like my adjudication, and will soon be gone,  
and the Prince of Brittany writes to say he is delayed.

We can ride together to this Tourney.

For once I can see your beauty grace an occasion,  
and perhaps I will break a lance myself.

But Lancelot of course must come. He is most welcome."

"Must I really come" said Lancelot, when he heard that decision  
"I would rather not have done".

"It is his will. We must obey" replied Guenevere  
fearing the fire, and tempted by it.

Yet each man and woman at that tournament  
spoke of the light on the face of Guenevere.

## **A Peak in Darien**

Sparrowhawk over the island: the children have not seen it.

The high hills in the distance are full of shadows:

Clouds like warrior ghosts. Are they brave, or bad and bold?

The sheep anyway survive, not to mention the shepherds.

By a pine tree in Darien a man and a woman.

“Yes, the children call it Darien. Quite poetic don’t you think?

Oh you like poetry do you? Well my children are quite keen on it.

Won’t last of course. At least I hope it won’t.

But still it might help you get on with them. I hope it will.

Wouldn’t do them any harm to know a real man.

Father away, and all that. And after that time in London

I think you’re pretty real James.

I wouldn’t have dragged my children half way across England

or got them risking their necks in an old dinghy

for anyone James. No, not here my love. Its not quite private.

Wait till tonight. I’ll have my cap in. Much safer.

I don’t want any more of the little dears, and anyway

it would be hard to explain with George in Hongkong.

No wait till tonight. I’ve got Mr Jackson eating out of my hand.

He will think nothing if I borrow his boat

and slip out to you, imagine I’ve gone for a dusk paddle

to look at the sunset. Bloody romantic!

Bad as my kids. Titty anyway. Suzie’s naughtier.

Needs her bottom smacking!

Won’t get it of course being a girl. George would be quite shocked,

though I might get round to it myself one day.

Would do her no harm at all! Silly little cow

– always thinks she knows whats best for everyone.

Don’t know how the other kids put up with her!

Still I will have to keep an eye open for their boat.

Can’t expect children by themselves to keep to bedtimes,

and would not do to be caught in flagrante by my own offspring,

at least not yet. Anyway I’ve given George two boys, and rather too  
many girls.

I don't see he can complain if I have a fling!  
One of his friends tried to warn me he's got a bint in Hongkong,  
but that's his affair as far as I am concerned,  
unless of course you and I get beyond a certain point;  
but not many people like us get like that  
do they dear. Too public, altogether too public,  
and George might even be mean and take my little horrors,  
though I don't think he would. He is not a bad soul is our George.  
Anyway I've never made love in a houseboat James.  
What will you do? Put a mattress on the floor? Don't worry about  
the details!

I'll help. What women are for!  
And James, you really must tell me about Lenin.  
He sounds really quite fascinating. And Trotsky too I imagine!  
But I hope you are not too much into communism, dear.  
A little money does help to grease the wheels.  
Is that why you are writing a book? Oh not poems James!  
There's nothing ever in that,  
though my youngest daughter is still at the silly age they like to  
recite rhymes!

Hopefully she will grow out of it soon!  
Oh you're not serious James. If it is poems I do hope there is  
something else as well!

Still your sister did give me the impression  
you have a decent amount of pennies to rub together, the pair of you,  
so perhaps you can indulge it.  
It's not as if you are living in the time of Wordsworth.  
He must have made a pretty penny in his day;  
but that is a long time ago. But still I am looking forward to tonight.  
As I said I've never made love in a houseboat.  
It ought to be different, as long as those kids don't board you  
just as we are really getting going.  
If they do I will have my eldest son touching his toes.

Oh James you surely don't not believe in corporal punishment!  
It's the most natural thing in the world, and so effective.

I don't know. Why do I love you?  
You have such odd ideas. Yes I will come love, yes I will, you know  
I will.

No don't come down to tea at the farmhouse.  
They would think it just a bit odd you know,  
and we would neither of us want any gossip, would we?  
Till later then love, till later!

## The Heretic

The priests say the Drummer dreams in Heaven

    Cadences like moonrays,

Quivering like willows in rain,

    Or sun on lake waters,

That have the indistinction

    Of a square before dawn,

Where indefinable shapes roam

    In a world not the same as our own.

He can reach the individualities of each moment,

    Between dream and waking has no borderline.

His purposeless visions have a completion

    We down here have not lived in.

But we can go out in rough weather,

    And know the joy of a journey achieved.

We can bask in a steady sun

    And let our wayward thoughts run wild.

We can do what was never our intention,

    And find our beginning was really our end.

Even his imagination must be proper and fitting.

    Ours can taste of laughter and darker perversions.

Yet he is our lord, the drummer that dreams in Heaven.

    Our priests spend their lives teaching his conventions.

To rule here I must ascend mountains

    To present my people's petitions

Yet I do not submit to him.



## **The Prophecy**

If there was only one who might be heard  
    Above all the clattering inaccuracies.  
The mirrors of our immaculately trained wizards  
    Are full of smoke and uncertainties

About which they mutter bare audibilities  
    – Adumbrations of not too serious surprises,  
That will above all demand no unexpected expense  
    To cause taxes unspeakably to rise.

If there was only one of them who had seen for real  
    The mind's barely perceptible cliff-edging trails  
and was unperturbed by the once laughed at tales  
    Of crouching evils, that now enter our reality

Then we would advance towards these coming sorrows  
    with something approaching committed faces.

## The Dragon Smith

Green moss, green moss, black with soot  
and the high rock roof stained  
by the craft of this scaled dragon smith  
who fashions with impervious paws  
the dreams of the kingdom.

The place is all odds and ends:  
trees from spring, leaves just out,  
roots with no home in mother earth;  
song birds raucous with lust;  
bodies – human, feral, of each kind  
– flesh that is soft, flesh that is hard,  
waxy as ripe fruit, or tortured  
– but always in imagination;  
babies to come, or not to come,  
as yet without faces;  
unlikely deeds, sudden creations,  
disaster breeding sudden hope;  
tragedy to cleanse the impossible;  
impossible beauty: all the craft  
of the Dragon Smith.

## **At Berry Head**

The waters beat at the cliff foot,  
and those much-shaped beings the rocks  
take on the aspect of unutterable creatures  
that grow hard with the demands of survival.

Clouds the colour of ink  
waver like a floating island  
in the subtle-hued ocean of the heavens,  
and the round white circle of the moon

spreads on the corrugations of the sea  
a light that is improbably golden  
on waves that throb and toss and whiten  
to the half globe of the horizon.