

The Fear of Change

If you and I were woken suddenly
By the drums of Revolution in the street —
Or suppose the door shot open, and there stood
Upright and singing a young bullfighter

With a skin of rough wine, offering to each of us
Death, sex, hope — or even just an
Earthquake, making the trees thrash, the roofs tumble,
Calling us loudly to consider God —

Let us admit, with no shame whatever,
We are not that kind of people;
We have learnt to weigh each word like an ounce of butter;
Our talent is for anger and monotony —

Therefore we will survive the singers,
The fighters, the so-called lovers — we will bury them
Regretfully, and spend a whole wet Sunday
Arguing whether the corpses were dressed in black or red.

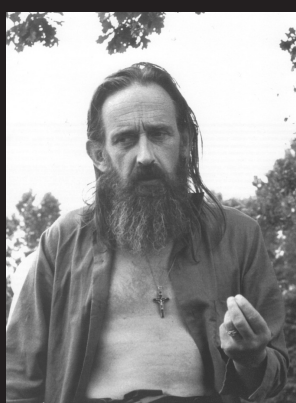


Photo: Ans Westra

James K. Baxter One of New Zealand's finest poets and most controversial figures, Baxter was often at odds with a society unable to face its disturbing reflection in his work. As a dramatist, literary critic and social commentator, Baxter often judged New Zealand society harshly, yet always from the perspective of one intimately involved in the social process. Baxter was legendary for his appearance — barefoot and bearded — and for establishing a spiritual commune at Jerusalem, near Wanganui. Baxter died in 1972 and in a rare honour for a Pākehā he received a full Māori tangi, attended by hundreds of people from the many walks of life with which Baxter's intersected.

(Biography by Paul Millar, from www.bookcouncil.org.nz)



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