

Tomcat

This tomcat cuts across the
zones of the respectable
through fences, walls, following
other routes, his own. I see
the sad whiskered skull-mouth fall
wide, complainingly, asking

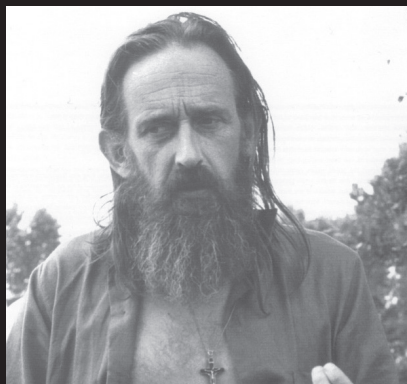
to be picked up and fed, when
I thump up the steps through bush
at 4 p.m. He has no
dignity, thank God! has grown
older, scruffier, the ash-
black coat sporting one or two

flowers like round stars, badges
of bouts and fights. The snake head
is seamed on top with rough scars:
old Samurai! He lodges
in cellars, and the tight furred
scrotum drives him into wars

as if mad, yet tumbling on
the rug looks female, Turkish-
trousered. His bagpipe shriek at
sluggish dawn dragged me out in
pyjamas to comb the bush
(he being under the vet

for septic bites): the old fool
stood, body hard as a board,
heart thudding, hair on end, at
the house corner, terrible,
yelling at something. They said,
'Get him doctored.' I think not.

Photo credit: Ans Westra



James K. Baxter was one of New Zealand's finest poets and most controversial figures, and 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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